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**TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOURSE IN MARK'S GOSPEL  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MARK 5:1-20**

**by**

**Stuart T. Rochester**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Theology and Religion**

**Durham University**

**2009**

**0 5 AUG 2009**



## Abstract

The study investigates Mark's Gospel as a witness to early Christian theological anthropology. Since, arguably, a strong element of Mark's purpose is the transformation of the reader, his text can appropriately be treated as an example of 'transformative discourse'. The study demonstrates that Mark's rhetoric includes elements of proclamation, demonstration, instruction, metaphor, indirection and performance, and that these interweave to produce a composite transformative discourse that potentially impacts its audience in a variety of ways.

A detailed exegesis of the Gerasene demoniac story (Mark 5:1-20) in its literary setting highlights its significant contribution to this transformative discourse. What happens to the demoniac typifies the dynamics of the Gospel's theological anthropology, and can be regarded as somewhat paradigmatic of human transformation in the context of Christian discipleship.

Because of its focus on the specific ways in which the language and narrative rhetoric of Mark's Gospel express ideas about human nature, the project makes possible an overview of Mark's theological anthropology. This reveals a vision of humanity that is both firmly founded on the anthropology of the scriptures and also strongly predicated on Jesus' eschatological perspective. The Gospel presents humankind as created but fundamentally distorted. However, the possibility of radical personal transformation that is allied to discipleship of Jesus, and that has communal ramifications, energises the rhetorical thrust of the Gospel. Its 'model reader' (the person who responds whole-heartedly as the author intends) is the eschatological *anthrōpos* who inhabits the in-breaking kingdom of God.

The study fills a gap in Markan studies by highlighting the contours of the transformative potential of the Gospel, specifying elements of the rhetorical means by which transformation of the reader is promoted, and showing how the rhetoric is linked with a dynamic eschatological anthropology.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is the product of my own work and does not include work that has been presented in any form for a degree at this or any other university. All quotations from, and reference to, the work of persons other than myself have been properly acknowledged throughout.

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## Abbreviations

BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and other early Christian literature</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CUP	<i>Cambridge University Press</i>
ExpT	<i>Expository Times</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBS	<i>Irish Bible Studies</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JTSA	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
NIBC	<i>New International Biblical Commentary</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OUP	<i>Oxford University Press</i>
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
RBL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
SBL	<i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>

Ancient texts are abbreviated in accordance with the *SBL Handbook of Style*.



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## CHAPTER 1

# MARK'S GOSPEL AS A LOCUS FOR THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### Introduction

This study focuses on some specific ways in which the language and narrative rhetoric of Mark's Gospel express ideas about the nature and destiny of human persons.<sup>1</sup> My aim is to investigate the presence in this Gospel of a theme that I have termed 'personal transformation'. The study provides evidence that this text works to foster the transformation of its readers or hearers in particular ways, and that it does so by employing various narrative and rhetorical strategies. More specifically, I aim to illuminate the contribution of Mark 5:1-20 (the story of the Gerasene demoniac) to this 'discourse of transformation' and to set this contribution within the context of an overview of the theological anthropology of Mark's Gospel.

The starting point of this introductory chapter is a brief general consideration of theological anthropology, which then narrows to reflect on the use of Mark's Gospel as a text in which to 'do' theological anthropology. I will argue that a consistent characteristic of Christian anthropology is transformation of the human person, and that in Mark's Gospel there is a rhetoric intentionally aimed at the transformation of its audience. The chapter thus presents a case for viewing Mark's Gospel as an example of transformative discourse. After locating my work in the context of other relevant studies, and providing a rationale for my investigation, I will outline my methods and briefly foreshadow the content of each chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study 'Gospel' is capitalised when it refers to specific texts (Mark and other evangelists); the uncapitalised 'gospel' refers more generally to the Christian εὐαγγέλιον.

## 1.1 Theological anthropology in the Gospels

### Towards a definition of theological anthropology

W. Paul Jones suggests that each person's inner world is characterised by some lived question, need, ache or dilemma that 'has its teeth into us at the deepest level'.<sup>2</sup> He focuses on five areas that he terms separation/reunion ('Where is home?'), conflict/vindication ('Where is justice?'), emptiness/fulfillment ('Who am I?'), condemnation/forgiveness ('What about my sin?') and suffering/endurance ('Why do I suffer?'). Of these five, 'Who am I?' is the question which most closely relates to my interest in searching out of foundations for a coherent self-understanding, in the context of a consistent set of ideas about human existence and purpose—an understanding that also informs practical ethics.

Because my outlook is Christian, like many others I have looked to the New Testament for the foundations of self-understanding. Among these documents, the writings of the apostle Paul seem to provide the most relevant material. He presupposes a rich vocabulary that speaks of such elements of the individual human person as 'heart', 'mind', 'soul', 'body' and 'spirit'.<sup>3</sup> Although he does not present his view of humanity systematically, Paul is nevertheless clear on several points. Among these are the desperate plight of humanity apart from God (Romans 1:18-3:20), God's provision for the redemption of humanity through the work of Christ (Romans 5:6-10), and a new dimension of life for those who follow Christ (Romans 6:1-11). He also speaks of humanity in its social dimension, highlighting the formation of a new type of community that acknowledges Christ as Lord (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2). Paul insists that faith in Christ results in transformation of people (μεταμορφόομαι, Romans 12:2) both individually and corporately. All of these

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<sup>2</sup> W. Paul Jones, *Worlds Within a Congregation: Dealing with Theological Diversity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> The literature on Pauline anthropology is voluminous; for references to the major works see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 51.



notions about the nature of human existence are aspects of a Christian theological anthropology.

In general, theological anthropology has been described as ‘a study of the human person in conversation with the doctrinal framework of particular religious traditions.’<sup>4</sup> In the context of specifically Christian tradition, Ian McFarland defines theological anthropology simply as ‘Christian reflection on human being.’<sup>5</sup> A more precise formulation is that of Janet Ruffing: Christian theological anthropology is ‘an articulation of a vision of human existence within the context of Christian revelation.’<sup>6</sup>

Christian theological anthropology may be done in different ways. Wolfhart Pannenberg, for example, takes ‘the phenomena of human existence as investigated in human biology, psychology, cultural anthropology or sociology’ and examines the findings of these disciplines ‘with an eye to implications that may be relevant to religion and theology.’<sup>7</sup> A Biblical Studies approach attempts a task that is rather different from this. For Udo Schnelle, for example, theological anthropology is first of all an exegetical discipline that must detail notions about humanity within the presuppositions and context of the biblical documents; it is ‘a presentation of the essence of humankind based on the revelation of the Word in Jesus Christ, as it is handed down to us in the New Testament.’<sup>8</sup> Schnelle emphasises the importance of revelation because ‘human beings cannot know themselves on their own: they are dependent on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ.’<sup>9</sup> By claiming the label ‘theological anthropology’ for this study, I signify that I am identifying and

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Treloar, ed., *Theological Anthropology: A Collection of Papers Prepared by Faith and Unity Commissioners of the National Council of Churches in Australia* (2005), 2. [http://www.ncca.org.au/\\_\\_data/page/104/Anthropology\\_Study.pdf](http://www.ncca.org.au/__data/page/104/Anthropology_Study.pdf) (accessed 2.2.09).

<sup>5</sup> Ian A. McFarland, *Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Janet K. Ruffing, “Anthropology, Theological,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 47.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul and John*, trans. O.C. Dean (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Schnelle, *Human Condition*, 6.

reflecting on a ‘vision of human existence’ that lies behind and is reflected in one of the New Testament documents. An articulation of this vision needs, of course, to be grounded in the historical and socio-cultural particularities of the first century.

### **The theological anthropology of the synoptic Gospels**

In the section above I identified some anthropological ideas that appear in Paul’s letters. Much less evident than Paul’s theological anthropology, and consequently less studied, is the theological anthropology embedded in the Gospels. The Gospels (despite their being compiled at a later date than Paul’s letters) present much narrative and didactic material that predates the apostolic post-Easter concern for distinctive Christian identity. On one level they merely tell the story of Jesus and pass on some of his teachings. Nevertheless, it is my conviction that, on closer examination, these texts reveal material that is highly relevant, even foundational, to a Christian understanding of humanity and identity.

At the outset I would identify three characteristics of the anthropology that might be discovered in the synoptics. First, it is primarily *theological*. This point echoes what I have written above. The gospel writers’ interest in human persons is above all an interest in the relationships of people to God, to Jesus, and to one another, and in how those relationships are identity-forming.

Second, their account of humanity is *implicit*. Although (for example) the teachings of Jesus constantly impinge on the sphere of the personal, the primary focus of the Gospels is elsewhere than on the nature of humanity itself. They are concerned above all with the identity of Jesus, his teachings and the story of his life. The Gospel writers, like Paul, undoubtedly *have* a theological anthropology—a set of ideas concerning the nature of humanity within their religious context. However, these ideas operate in the background of their work in the sense that they rarely draw attention to them. This means that we must carefully tease out their anthropological ideas from the (largely) narrative material that they offer.



Third, their anthropology is *dynamic*. It envisages human lives in transition. The texts challenge their readers to *be* different and to *behave* differently. At the heart of their message is a call to change and be changed in response to personal encounters with Jesus. In recognition of this dynamism it is appropriate to use the expression ‘personal transformation’.

## 1.2 Transformative discourse in the Gospels

### The transformation of persons

I suggested above that the theological anthropology of the Gospels has a dynamic characteristic, and I foreshadowed the use of the expression ‘personal transformation’. This expression is, of course, a modern one, and a rather slippery one at that. It must be recognised that concepts of ‘person’ have evolved to a major extent since the first century.<sup>10</sup> In addition, ‘personal transformation’ today covers a wide variety of interests that include self-discovery, self-improvement and personal development, and that employ an assortment of tools that include psychotherapy, meditation, yoga and ‘new spiritualities’.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, myths of transformation (tales in which ontological boundaries get blurred and human beings turn into gods, animals and plants) have been used in many periods and cultures to conceptualize what it is to be, and to cease to be, human.

Transformation is not in itself a theological concept. Its most basic meaning is a change in the form, shape or appearance of a thing. Transferred to a more

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<sup>10</sup> For a survey, see Mary B. Mahowald, “Person,” in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 1934–40. For discussions of various aspects of personhood, ancient and modern, see Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985). For Christian views see Robert Innes, *Discourses of the Self: Seeking Wholeness in Theology and Psychology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999) and Klaus Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament*, trans. Charles Muenchow (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 26–43.

<sup>11</sup> An internet search for ‘personal transformation’ reveals not only the immensity of interest in the topic but also a plethora of different paths.



abstract realm, it usually denotes a process in which the character, condition, or function of something is markedly altered. Applied to persons, transformation may include physical changes (e.g., healing), cognitive changes (e.g., shifts in beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, self-understanding) and relational changes (e.g., altered status, kinship, communication). Any of these may lead to changes in behaviour, in status or in the direction of one's life. Exterior changes may be responses to interior changes, and *vice versa*. A wide variety of external or internal factors may result in ontological changes in the person.

An adequate definition of personal transformation must take into account the relative significance of such changes. Not all changes are of such importance as to be consequential. And if there are consequences, these may show varying degrees of permanence. A working definition of personal transformation, then, might be: 'the process by which, as a result of a particular event or experience, a person undergoes a change in character, condition or function, resulting in significant enduring effects on the person's continuing life.'

Note, however, that this definition ignores several relevant aspects. First, it does not specify the direction of change, whether it be positive or negative. For example, a deprivation or an accident may cause drastic debilitating changes in a person's condition or function. Second, it fails to consider the agency of change. Is the change effected by a cause outside the person, or is it self-initiated? In other words, is it passive or active with respect to the one changed? Third, it does not include social aspects of transformation. Additionally, it fails both to specify what constitutes a 'significant' change and to quantify the duration of such transformation. With these questions in mind, a major concern of the present study is to specify the *kinds* of personal transformation envisaged by Mark's Gospel as changes that the author desires for his audience. To begin, how does the NT speak of transformation?

## The vocabulary of transformation in the New Testament

The English language has borrowed the Greek term for transformation, *metamorphosis*. Although μεταμόρφωσις is absent from the NT, its cognate verb μεταμορφόω makes an appearance four times. In Mark 9:2 (= Matthew 17:2) Jesus is ‘transformed’ in the sight of three disciples.<sup>12</sup> In Romans 12:2 Paul urges his readers to be ‘transformed by the renewing of your mind’.<sup>13</sup> In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul describes a process of transformation ‘into the image of the Lord, from glory to glory’. All of these occur as passives, and are probably to be taken as instances of the ‘divine passive’. A parallel to the last passage is found in Romans 8:29, where a related word, the adjective σύμμορφος, refers to the conformation of believers into the image of Christ. The same word is used in Philippians 3:21 in the context of the final transformation of believers ‘in conformity with the body of [Christ’s] glory’. Similarly, the cognate verb συμμορφίζω is used in Philippians 3:10, where Paul speaks of his being ‘conformed to [Christ’s] death’ as a present experience.

Despite the rarity of occurrences of the specific term μεταμόρφωσις and its cognates, the idea of transformation of human persons is pervasive in the NT. In the context of the final changes of the Christian from mortality to immortality, Paul uses the verbs ἀλλάσσω (1 Cor 15:51-52) and μετασχηματίζω (Phil 3:21).<sup>14</sup> The varied vocabulary of transformation also includes the verbs ἐπιστρέφω (‘turn’, 1 Thess 1:9) and μετανόω (‘repent’, Mark 1:15) together with their cognate nouns ἐπιστροφή (used in Acts 15:3 for the conversion of the Gentiles) and μετάνοια (‘repentance’, Luke 15:7).

The metaphor of ‘darkness to light’ is used by several writers. In Acts 26:18 Luke recounts Paul’s explanation of his mission to the Gentiles: ‘to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light’. This metaphor also appears in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, where ‘blindness of the mind’ is reversed by the activity of God:

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<sup>12</sup> Implications of this unique transformation will be considered in Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Translations of NT texts are taken from the New American Standard Bible (1995) except where otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> Μετασχηματίζω also refers to self-transformation for the purpose of disguise in 2 Cor 11:14-15.



‘God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness”, has shone in our hearts to give the light of ... Christ’. 1 Peter 2:9-10 uses the same imagery as one element of a series of assertions about the changes undergone by his audience—changes in identity and in standing before God, ‘who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.’

Then there is the imagery of ‘new birth’ (John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23), which is reflected in the images of the ‘new creature’ (2 Cor 5:17) and the νέος ἄνθρωπος (Col 3:10). In addition, E.P. Sanders points out that Paul’s use of the passive forms of the verb δικαιόω (to be ‘righteoused’) brings to this term the connotation of ‘something which happens to a person’—something that changes not just one’s status but the realm in which one lives.<sup>15</sup> These are but a few of the many ways in which personal transformation is described and advocated in the NT.

### **Transformation in the Gospels**

The Gospel stories recount many specific cases of personal transformation as a result of Jesus’ ministry. In addition to such narratives, the Gospels also offer didactic material in which Jesus promises transformation, makes reference to transformation, or challenges his audience to be transformed. Each Gospel can also be viewed as a rhetorical statement of its author, making its own appeal to its audience to change their minds, through challenging the audiences’ perceptions of Jesus’ identity, their understandings of God and the world, and their own self-understandings. The Gospels also call for changes in what we would term ‘lifestyle’. They offer the possibility of liberation from certain social, religious and spiritual constraints, and urge commitment to the discipleship of Jesus. Appropriate response to these appeals will involve significant personal transformation. Since each of these elements claims a substantial amount of attention in the gospel texts, these documents can be viewed

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<sup>15</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 48.

as particular examples of ‘transformative discourse’.<sup>16</sup> Chapter 2 will examine this theme in greater detail.

### Transformative discourse

I use the term ‘discourse’ in a special, technical sense. The prevailing sense of the word is ‘a spoken or written treatment of a subject at length; a treatise, sermon, or the like.’<sup>17</sup> Thus it is common to refer to a passage such as Mark 13:5-37, which incorporates no narrative elements, as a ‘discourse’. In narrative criticism and reader-oriented criticism, however, the word has come to be used in different ways. ‘Discourse analysis’ recognises that a text evinces multiple levels of communication. Within the narrative itself there are interchanges between characters. On another level, though, there is ‘discourse’ between the narrator and the implied audience.<sup>18</sup> It is in this sense that the seminal work of Seymour Chatman distinguishes between the ‘story’ and the ‘discourse’ of a narrative.<sup>19</sup> The ‘story’ refers to the surface elements of the narrative, such as the settings, characters and plot. The ‘discourse’ refers to how the story is told—how it employs the strategies of rhetoric to maximise the text’s intended effect on the reader. Robert Fowler gives the example of the narrative of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:9-11—at the ‘story level’ Jesus is the only person to hear the voice from heaven, but at the ‘discourse level’ the storyteller makes sure that the reader hears the voice, too.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For the use of this expression I acknowledge Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized by the Cross: The Death of Jesus in Paul’s Transformative Discourse,” in *SBL 1993 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 740–57.

<sup>17</sup> C.T. Onions, ed., *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Joel B. Green, “Discourse Analysis and New Testament Interpretation,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 176. Green points out that a third level of discourse takes effect between the text and new generations of readers, including those of the present day.

<sup>19</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 15–16.



That a reader will respond to a story is one of the central assumptions of narrative criticism.<sup>21</sup> While it is impossible, of course, to determine exactly *how* the reader will respond, discourse analysis attempts to identify literary cues that give some indication of responses that seem to be expected by the author or at least invited by the text. The reading event ‘activates the text’ and brings to bear on the readers the text’s transformative power.<sup>22</sup>

The expression ‘transformative potential’ has been employed by several scholars in recent years. Walter Brueggemann uses it in his treatment of the rhetorical strategy of Isaiah 37.<sup>23</sup> According to Paul Ricoeur, the transformative power of a text lies in its ability to suggest, to mediate or to make possible a ‘proposed world’ which readers may adopt or inhabit.<sup>24</sup> Aware that apocalyptic literature characteristically fosters the perception of a new world order, Alexandra Brown examines 1 Corinthians 1-2 as transformative discourse that promotes ‘cognitive transformation’.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Elna Mouton investigates the ‘transformative potential’ of *Ephesians* in a study that links the author’s rhetoric and anthropology. She notes that through various strategies, including temporal and spatial metaphors, the readers are urged to change their view of humanity.<sup>26</sup>

An emphasis on personal transformation through reading the Gospels has always been present in Christian communities who value the texts as revelatory scripture. While this perspective on the texts has not always been taken seriously in the world of biblical scholarship, its validity is now being recognised and advocated by many scholars, so that ‘spiritual hermeneutics’ is taking its place alongside

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Allan Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 239–55.

<sup>22</sup> Green, “Discourse Analysis,” 179.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Isaiah 37:21–29: The Transformative Potential of a Public Metaphor,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10 (1988): 1–32.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 92–95, cited in Elna Mouton, “The Transformative Potential of Ephesians in a Situation of Transition,” *Semeia* 78 (1997): 131.

<sup>25</sup> Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized”, also Alexandra R. Brown, *The Cross and Human Transformation: Paul’s Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Mouton, “Transformative Potential.”

various ‘pragmatic’ approaches (liberation, feminist, ethical) to biblical interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Sandra Schneiders writes that the text mediates engagement with (transcendent) reality, and its interpreter undergoes a kind of transformative experience that enables one to emerge from the experience somehow different.<sup>28</sup>

The present study takes just one Gospel, that which is ‘according to Mark’,<sup>29</sup> and examines the ways in which its rhetoric at the ‘discourse level’ seems intended to persuade its readers to change and to be changed in certain ways. The Gospel appeals for the kinds of response that constitute personal transformation. It has in view, and works towards, the transformation of its audience. The author is vitally (even perhaps primarily) concerned with human transformation to such an extent that his text may be regarded as a kind of transformative discourse.

Having raised the matter of ‘intention,’ I consider now the question of Mark’s purpose in writing.

### 1.3 The purpose of Mark’s Gospel

There is nothing in Mark’s Gospel that corresponds to the statements of authorial purpose that we find in other Gospels. John’s Gospel, for example, declares, ‘These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31). This explicit two-pronged statement of purpose expresses the author’s desire that for his readers his document will be transformative. His aim is that they will not only exercise faith, but

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<sup>27</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, “The Gospels and the Reader,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 99–103.

<sup>28</sup> Schneiders, “Gospels,” 109.

<sup>29</sup> For reasons of convention and convenience I refer to the author of the second Gospel as ‘Mark’, recognising that, although there is a tradition that names the author, the work is actually anonymous. For a comprehensive study on this issue see C. Clifton Black, *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).



that they will also receive and experience a new kind of existence.<sup>30</sup> Luke's Gospel, likewise, has its purpose specified in its prologue (Luke 1:1-4). Luke, speaking with his own voice, states that he is compiling a carefully ordered account of the traditions about Jesus, so that his addressee Theophilus 'might know the truth (ἀσφάλεια).'

Mark's aims are nowhere so explicit, and consequently many scholars have tried to deduce them. Most of the numerous suggestions as to Mark's overall purpose can be placed in three main categories: christological, apologetic/kerygmatic and paraenetic.<sup>31</sup> It will be seen that there is some overlap between these, and I will argue that, in fact, it is more realistic to accept that a composite purpose underlies Mark's work. Before examining these three categories, however, I want to address briefly the closely related question of the nature of Mark's intended audience—is the Gospel addressed to Christians or non-Christians? Mark is not explicit about this, either.

### **Mark's audience**

Evidence for a Christian audience is of several types. The first depends on the assumption that Mark's content substantially reflects the experiences of the (Christian) community he was writing for.<sup>32</sup> According to this view, the text indirectly provides information about the actual historical situation of the author and his audience. Thus, for example, when the Markan Jesus warns of persecutions, as he does in 10:30 and 13:9-13, we could assume that persecution, or the threat of it,

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<sup>30</sup> John's Jesus is uniquely insistent on the connection between 'believing' and 'having (eternal) life'—see Jn 3:15,16,36; 5:24,38-40; 6:27-29,33-35,40,47; 11:25; 17:3.

<sup>31</sup> W.R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 28–29. My brief survey here makes no claim to be exhaustive.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Howard C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977). Scholars continue to argue about whether the Gospels were written for specific, discrete Christian communities in particular locales or for all Christians in the various parts of the Roman Empire. The stimulus for this discussion was Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). For incisive critiques, see Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 25–28 and Hendrika Nicoline Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 17–21.

was a reality for Mark's audience.<sup>33</sup> In an extreme form of this kind of mirror-reading, the Gospel would become virtually an allegory of early Christian community life. This way of reading the text is common among scholars of the Gospels, but it has been criticised. Stephen Barton writes that 'such interpretations positively distract our attention from the plain sense and the clear rhetorical goal of the text.'<sup>34</sup> However, it seems reasonable to assume that Mark's text reflects to some extent his own situation and interests and those of his Christian associates.

Another kind of evidence for a Christian audience depends on a discernment of Mark's expectations of his readers and hearers. Readers are expected to understand without clarification such christological titles as 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God'. They are also expected to be familiar with the Alexander and Rufus mentioned in 15:21 and the James and Joses mentioned in 15:40. These references indicate that there was probably a close relationship between Mark and his readers. In addition, as Whitney Shiner points out, Mark's initial call story (1:16-20) presupposes that the (Christian) readers know the reasons why Jesus' first disciples follow him without any stated motivation, and before any mighty deeds are narrated.<sup>35</sup>

In a recent consideration of Mark's purpose, Hendrika Roskam argues for a Christian audience. Perhaps her strongest evidence lies in the fact that the Gospel contains material that offers instruction, encouragement and comfort specifically to followers of Jesus. The ethical instructions concerning servanthood (10:42-45) will be more easily appropriated by those who have already recognised the Servant ministry of Jesus. Another example is the promise of the Spirit: 'When they arrest

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<sup>33</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 14–15. Roskam is aware of the many objections against mirror-reading, but she maintains that 'there seems to be no alternative if one wants to understand Mark's Gospel historically'. This also is the perspective from which Marcus appears to write when he argues (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 33–37) for a particular historical setting for Mark 13.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen C. Barton, "Can We Identify the Gospel Audiences?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 184. See also Edward W. Klink, "The Gospel Community Debate: State of the Question," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2004): 60–85.

<sup>35</sup> Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Follow Me!: Disciples in Markan Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 183–86.



you and deliver you up, do not be anxious...' (13:11); this reassurance in the face of persecution would not be relevant to a non-Christian audience.<sup>36</sup> John Riches comments that, although the Gospel seems designed to act both as propaganda and as encouragement, its 'concern with the dark side of the new group's experience would suggest that it is a work more for the members of the group than for the outside world.'<sup>37</sup>

However, some of Roskam's evidence is weak because she fails to recognise that much of Mark's material may be appropriated just as well by non-Christians as by Christians. The rhetorical questions in 4:41 and 6:2, the answers to which may easily be filled in by Christian readers, serve effectively as challenges to non-Christian readers to identify Jesus. The quotation of scripture passages such as 12:35-37 does not necessarily mean that all readers would accept a Christian interpretation; this material would be revelatory for a non-Christian audience.<sup>38</sup>

It has become more difficult to argue for a homogeneous audience for the Gospel. Mark makes many allusions to Hebrew scriptures without explaining their significance; this suggests that his implied audience is familiar with these scriptures, and is therefore Jewish. However, Mark's many explanations of Jewish practices and translations of Aramaic words suggest a Gentile audience.<sup>39</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert's work supports her view that Mark's rhetorical goals are exhortation (for individual Christians in need of encouragement) and proselytising (for interested people who needed to be persuaded to commit themselves fully).<sup>40</sup> In the view of Mary Ann Beavis, the narrative sections as well as the didactic blocks of the Gospel function as

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<sup>36</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> John K. Riches, "The Synoptic Evangelists and Their Communities," in *Christian Beginnings: Word & Community from Jesus to Post-Apostolic Times*, ed. Jürgen Becker (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 216.

<sup>38</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Reading Mark from the Outside: Eco and Iser Leave Their Marks* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1995), 107. Tate's conclusion is that Mark's implied reader is a Gentile Christian familiar with the Scriptures but ignorant for the most part of Jewish religious practices.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 304.

proclamatory and instructional ‘teaching’ for audiences that could well have included non-Christians. The Gospel is religious propaganda to be ‘performed’ (by analogy with Greco-Roman plays) before interested listeners; as such, it could be used also as a handbook for missionaries.<sup>41</sup>

My conclusion is that the evidence for an exclusively Christian audience is insufficiently strong. I will proceed on the assumption that the text would have been received by audiences that included Christians and non-Christians (both Jewish and Gentile).

As I indicated above, suggestions as to Mark’s purpose can be placed in three main categories: (a) christological, (b) apologetic/kerygmatic and (c) paraenetic. I will deal with each possibility in turn.

#### **(a) A christological purpose: Mark’s focus on Jesus himself**

Mark’s Gospel contains much material about its central figure, Jesus. The Gospel makes certain claims as to his identity, encourages a particular understanding of him, and goes some way towards interpreting his death. Those understandings are cast in narrative form—‘storied’—and interwoven with the theme of discipleship in such a way that the work has been characterised appropriately as ‘narrative christology.’<sup>42</sup> What lies behind Mark’s writing about Jesus? Some scholars have seen the Gospel as a polemical text, written to correct false ideas about Jesus’ identity. A controversial proponent of this view is T.J. Weeden, who argues that Mark is correcting a docetic ‘divine man’ theology by minimising the miracles, presenting Jesus as the suffering ‘Son of Man’ and the disciples as apostate.<sup>43</sup> Although this

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark’s Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4:11–12* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 60–66, 170–176.

<sup>42</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, “Mark, Gospel of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. IV* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 556; Joel B. Green, “The Gospel According to Mark,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. S.C. Barton (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 147–54.

<sup>43</sup> Theodore J. Weeden, “The Heresy That Necessitated Mark’s Gospel,” in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. W. Telford (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 64–77; Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).



view is now largely discredited,<sup>44</sup> it is nevertheless true that corrective elements are present in the Gospel, for Jesus warns the disciples about ‘false Christs’ who may deceive and mislead (13:5-6, 21-22). Christological misunderstanding is highlighted also in Peter’s inability to understand Jesus as a suffering Messiah (8:31-32), a role Mark reiterates several times (9:12, 31; 10:33). Such misunderstanding is likely to have been a common problem amongst people (both Christians and non-Christians) for whom Mark wrote, and consequently it must be acknowledged that correcting such misunderstanding is one of the functions of the Gospel. It is thus likely that part of Mark’s purpose was to provide an accurate understanding of the person and ministry of Jesus. Whether this was the *sole* purpose of Mark’s work, however, can be questioned, for reasons given below.

**(b) An apologetic/kerygmatic purpose: Mark’s focus on the message**

Mark’s Gospel certainly contains material promoting beliefs and practices that had become distinctively ‘Christian’. Mark devotes a sizable proportion of his text to Jesus’ teaching, including moral instruction couched in religious and eschatological terms. A theme evident throughout the text is teaching on discipleship, given directly by word and indirectly by example. Some scholars maintain that the Gospel’s purpose is to focus on this message, rather than on Jesus, the central character. Although a distinction is to be made between *apologia* (intellectual defence of belief) and *kerygma* (proclamation of the faith), I have not found it helpful to use this distinction as a basis for categorisation because, in the case of Mark’s Gospel, one blends into the other. Each involves presenting the message of the ‘good news’ about Jesus. It is more helpful to make a distinction between the Gospel’s impact on Christian believers and its impact on hearers who are as yet uncommitted. As I argued above, it is very reasonable to assume that people from both groups may be present in the audience. I will consider, then, how each of these two groups may

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<sup>44</sup> See Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 75–79; J.D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). For a concise summary of the objections see Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 78–79.

have heard Mark's Gospel if it is viewed as having been written with an apologetic/kerygmatic purpose.

For non-Christians, the Gospel is the vehicle Mark uses to *preach* the message about Jesus. Mark's purpose, in this case, is either *apologetic*, aiming to defend Jesus, his message and his followers in the face of criticism and accusation, or it is *kerygmatic*, aiming to preach and teach, with a major emphasis on clarifying the significance of Jesus' crucifixion. It may, of course, be both. In either case, Mark aims to persuade. Robert Gundry is convinced that an apologetic purpose provides a comprehensive explanation for the way in which Mark presents the various elements of his work; the text is evangelistic, aimed at converting to Christ readers who may see the cross as a major stumbling block.<sup>45</sup> For John Painter, the Gospel is an apologetic work with the function of theodicy: in the face of prevailing evil Mark tells the story of the miracle-working Jesus as 'good news' that kindles belief in the goodness and power of God, but he also narrates the crucifixion of Jesus in a way that integrates it, too, into the 'good news.'<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Edwin Broadhead presents a cogent justification for his view that, although it is a christological narrative, the purpose of the Gospel is kerygmatic and evangelistic. Because it is presented as a proclamation, and because the entire work is a message about Jesus (1:1), 'the Gospel posits a central demand for those who act within the story and for those upon whom this story acts: go and tell the story of God's work in Jesus.'<sup>47</sup> Thus it is plausible to view Mark's Gospel as an apologetic/kerygmatic text addressed primarily to non-Christians.

However, most interpreters recognise that, as discussed above, there are strong indications that the Gospel is addressed primarily to Christian believers. Many scholars see the primary emphasis of Mark's work as instruction for the

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1022–26.

<sup>46</sup> John Painter, *Mark's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1997), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Edwin K. Broadhead, *Prophet, Son, Messiah: Narrative Form and Function in Mark 14–16* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 283.



church, especially in the area of discipleship. Christian believers, diverse in their apprehension of the principles of their faith, need to be taught. Mark's Gospel functions as a summary of the Church's proclamation, for its own use. This view seems to have been the consensus view of an earlier generation of scholars.<sup>48</sup> For C.F.D. Moule, although it is the *preaching* that is primarily the content of Mark, this *kerygma* is presented as instruction for Christians, in order to familiarise them with what they need as equipment for their apologetic and evangelistic witness to outsiders.<sup>49</sup> This view is still current. Marcus maintains that Mark intended his work as a teaching tool for Christians in his community.<sup>50</sup> Nils Dahl comes to a somewhat similar conclusion. However, from a consideration of an admittedly limited selection of material, he argues that the Gospel is not so much kerygmatic as 'anamnetic'—it is not to persuade readers to believe in the message (they are already 'in the know') but 'to *remind* them of what is contained in it in order that they might understand what has been given to them.'<sup>51</sup> In Marcus's words, Mark 'recalls his audience to christological memory—in other words, to faith.'<sup>52</sup> Thus the content is teaching, but it has a paraenetic function as well, for it is the kind of teaching that recalls its hearers to faith and endurance.

Roskam maintains that the central message of the Gospel is that Jesus was not an anti-Roman rebel—the Gospel is an apology, written in a polemical situation, defending Jesus and his followers against accusations of subversiveness.<sup>53</sup> However, Roskam recognises that Mark's audience is largely Christian. She concludes that Mark intends to strengthen his readers, reassuring them that in becoming Christians they have taken the right decision, encouraging them to defend themselves against

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<sup>48</sup> John A.T. Robinson, "The Destination and Purpose of St. John's Gospel," in *New Testament Issues*, ed. Richard Batey (London: SCM Press, 1970), 191.

<sup>49</sup> C.F.D. Moule, "The Intention of the Evangelists," in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 169-170, 173.

<sup>50</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl, "The Purpose of Mark's Gospel," in *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 52-65 (58).

<sup>52</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 79.

<sup>53</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 216, 231.

possible accusations, and urging them not to be discouraged by persecution and suffering. His aim is ‘to confirm its readers in their faithfulness to the Christian message, so that they will be strong enough to resist the pressure caused by possible persecutions.’<sup>54</sup> Here again is the recognition of a paraenetic purpose alongside an apologetic one.

Mark’s story of Jesus is clearly ‘good news’ that is at once a proclamation for ‘all nations’ (13:10) and a foundation for Christian action (‘for my sake and the gospel’s’, 8:35). It is therefore difficult to deny that the *message* itself is a strong component of Mark’s purpose.

### **(c) A paraenetic purpose: Mark’s focus on the audience**

Mark’s Gospel contains material that is undoubtedly relevant to the continuing life of the Christian community (e.g., the predictions of troubles in Mark 13). It is possible, therefore, that Mark may have been just as concerned to focus on the text’s *audience* and the response of that audience as on its message and its central protagonist. In this view, the Gospel aims to build up the faith of his Christian readers, warning them about the future, encouraging them to persevere as disciples and equipping them to face persecution (or at least the threat of it). A discussion of the various suggestions for the Gospel’s *Sitz im Leben* is beyond the scope of my present project. I note, though, that for William Lane, who accepts the traditional Roman setting for the Gospel, Mark’s task was to narrate Jesus’ suffering and martyrdom as part of a pastoral response to a situation in which the Roman Christians were themselves in danger of martyrdom.<sup>55</sup> For Howard Kee, on the other hand, the setting is Syrian, but Mark’s motivation is very similar: his radically

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<sup>54</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 216–17.

<sup>55</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 15, 25 For a more recent case for a Roman setting see Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark’s Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).



alienated ‘community’ needed encouragement to persevere in the face of mounting hostility from Jew and Gentile alike.<sup>56</sup>

### **A composite purpose: for a mixed audience**

It has become increasingly difficult to argue for a *single* purpose for Mark’s Gospel. Aspects of paraenesis, apology and kerygma are strongly in evidence within the Gospel, and there is still no consensus as to which one, if any, is dominant. It seems unwise to argue strongly for some single purpose that does not present itself unequivocally. While Luke T. Johnson is, to a large extent, correct in his assertion that ‘we can no longer reconstruct Mark’s motivation for his writing,’<sup>57</sup> it is possible to recognise (along with some older Markan scholars, as well as some recent ones) a ‘multifaceted’ purpose. Rawlinson, in his 1925 commentary, sees the Gospel as written

partly to edify converts, ... partly to supply Christian preachers with materials for missionary preaching, and partly also to furnish a kind of armoury of apologetic arguments for use in controversy with opponents, whether Jewish or heathen.<sup>58</sup>

Ralph P. Martin argues that Mark’s purpose is a synthesis of christological, apologetic and paraenetic concerns, none of which can be sidelined.<sup>59</sup> R.T. France comes to a similar conclusion:

Mark’s aim was to write about Jesus, and in the process a number of his personal concerns and the circumstances of the church within which he wrote will have guided his writing, without any of them being so dominant as to be (consciously or unconsciously) *the* purpose of the book.<sup>60</sup>

David Rhoads infers Mark’s purpose from a narrative-critical study of the standards of judgment that govern the Gospel: Mark’s aim is a synthesis that combines kerygma and paraenesis. His goal is ‘nothing less than fostering this new world [the

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<sup>56</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 100.

<sup>57</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 149.

<sup>58</sup> A.E.J. Rawlinson, *Commentary on St. Mark’s Gospel* (London: Methuen, 1925), xxii.

<sup>59</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1972), 163-4. See also D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 19-20, 29-30.

<sup>60</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 23.



kingdom of God] among all who would hear his Gospel.’<sup>61</sup> His text, then, encourages his readers to proclaim the kingdom of God on the basis of the proclamation they themselves have received. Similarly, Robert Humphrey’s recent rhetorical analysis of the Gospel concludes that it is best characterised as a ‘call to discipleship’.<sup>62</sup> Such a call necessarily encompasses elements of apology, kerygma and paraenesis in the context of the story of Jesus.

In conclusion, to regard the Gospel as having been written with a composite purpose for a mixed audience appears to be the most sensible and realistic approach. Recent research confirms that Greco-Roman *bioi* were often produced with multiple audiences (primary and secondary, definite and indefinite) in mind.<sup>63</sup> The Gospel’s significance cannot be restricted to believers only, for its content is applicable to a wide variety of readers. As Stephen Barton writes, ‘if Mark’s Gospel has a pastoral intention, which there is good reason to accept, there is no good reason to deny that it has an evangelistic or “propagandistic” intention as well.’<sup>64</sup> More recent reader-oriented approaches to biblical narratives make the point that stories that are rich in theme defy simple analysis of their ‘intention’ or even ‘message’, because different audiences will perceive different aspects of the text’s richness.<sup>65</sup> If its various modern interpreters have discovered in Mark’s ‘open text’ such a richness of possibilities, it seems realistic to allow the same range of applicability for ancient audiences.

### **Mark’s purpose: transformation of the reader**

Whichever of these various theories is judged to be the best expression of Mark’s purpose, it is arguable that each of them assumes that Mark is indeed aiming to

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<sup>61</sup> David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Robert L. Humphrey, *Narrative Structure and Message in Mark: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003), vi.

<sup>63</sup> Justin M. Smith, “Genre, Sub-Genre and Questions of Audience: A Proposed Typology for Greco-Roman Biography,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 4 (2007): 206–11.

<sup>64</sup> Barton, “Audiences,” 185.

<sup>65</sup> John Goldingay, “How Far Do Readers Make Sense?: Interpreting Biblical Narrative,” *Themelios* 18 (1993): 6.

influence his readers to change their minds or behaviour. Mark's focus on a proper understanding of Jesus aims to refashion opinions about him and to foster faith in him. Through hearing this message, a non-believer might be transformed into a believer, and a non-disciple into a follower. An *apologetic* purpose aims to overcome objections to the shame of the cross, to correct false assumptions about Jesus' followers, and to allay suspicion directed at Christians and the Christian way. Readers of Mark's text might, as a result of their reading, be transformed in their understanding, and so become empowered for their own discipleship, or at least become more open towards Christ and the Christian community. A purpose that is *kerygmatic* aims to publicise both the repertoire of stories about Jesus and the body of his teaching. Hearers of this proclamation might be expected to become bolder disciples with a more informed evangelistic thrust and a more profound moral life. A purpose that is *paraenetic* aims to nourish in the Christian community the qualities of faith, love and patience, to promote a greater alertness and perseverance, to enhance the ability to endure persecution and resist its temptations, and to relativise worldly powers in the light of the kingdom of God. Those who receive Mark's encouragement would certainly form a more consolidated Christian community and be better equipped for more faithful following. Each of the above-mentioned purposes, then, would imply the expectation of some degree of transformation on the part of those who respond positively to the Gospel.

Since the advent of narrative and rhetorical criticism, some attention has been given to the extent to which Mark 'pressurises' his audience toward change, and to the techniques he uses to do it. Many students of Mark's Gospel have suggested, in passing, that its author had, as one of his aims, the transformation of the reader. Kelber hinted at this when he wrote that 'reading the Gospel is but the beginning of the gospel's actualisation in real life'.<sup>66</sup> More recent writers have been

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<sup>66</sup> Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 94. Similar is the observation of Tolbert (Tolbert, *Sowing*, 288): 'The experience of hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ should lead to action, and it is *the desire to provoke this action* that crafts the final scenes.'



much more explicit about Mark's rhetorical purpose. For example (emphasis mine):

The author has told the story *in order to transform the reader*... As a whole, the story seeks to shatter the readers' way of seeing the world and invites them to embrace another, thus impelling them to action.<sup>67</sup>

In one of the most recent rhetorical studies, Whitney Shiner argues that the Gospel of Mark received 'performed' readings soon after it was written. Such dramatic presentations, in line with the conventions of oral performance in the ancient world, would be events of intense emotional power, and would be intentionally transformative for the audience.<sup>68</sup>

I have argued so far that in Mark's use of both narrative and didactic material, and in the overall structure of his writing, we may detect evidence of a purpose that directs his hearers and readers, both Christian and non-Christian, towards transformation. Rhetorical aspects of Mark's Gospel will be considered in more detail in the following chapter.

## 1.4 Previous studies on Mark's anthropology

The anthropology of the Gospels has received little systematic attention from scholars. Several writers have presented surveys of the theological anthropology of the Gospels as components of larger studies on the theological anthropology of the New Testament. Others have concentrated on the Gospels, but without attention to the particularities of individual evangelists. In the following survey I note especially work that is relevant to a consideration of the theological anthropology of Mark's Gospel. A few more recent studies are more fruitful in this regard.

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<sup>67</sup> David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel (Second Edition)* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 1.

<sup>68</sup> Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 191–93.



## H. Wheeler Robinson

Wheeler Robinson's brief treatment (1926)<sup>69</sup> acknowledges that the Gospels' anthropological conceptions are, for the most part, in continuity with those of the Old Testament, as developed and modified by intertestamental Judaism. For example, the Gospels presuppose human sin, offering no theory of its origin. However, their vision of humanity gives a more prominent place to life beyond death than does previous Jewish literature. The new features of Jesus' teachings, then, are changes of emphasis, not content.<sup>70</sup>

Not surprisingly, Robinson's presentation is dated in several respects. First, his study makes much of the metaphor of the fatherhood of God, with its implications for man as the child of God: the value of the child, his duty of obedience, his relation to the 'brotherhood of man,' and the 'broken sonship' characterised by sin. This organising metaphor owes much to the liberal views of scholars such as Adolf von Harnack, whom Robinson quotes, and seems to be a perspective imposed on the texts.<sup>71</sup> Robinson is nonetheless correct in seeing Jesus as the *model* of divine sonship, as Jesus is dependent on God and obedient to God's will.

Since Robinson's work predates redaction criticism and narrative approaches, he treats the synoptic Gospels as an undifferentiated whole, and fails to take account of the particularities of the different gospel writers. He also implies that the anthropology of the Gospels is to be found solely in Jesus' teaching. That is, he does not acknowledge the possibility that there may be significant elements of anthropological interest arising from the ways in which the material is narrated and redacted. The delineation of a theological anthropology cannot be limited to isolating doctrinal formulations or explicitly theological assertions or propositions. Viewing the Gospel as *narrative* makes it possible to use subtle literary features such

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<sup>69</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, 3rd Ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1926).

<sup>70</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *Christian Doctrine of Man*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> See Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?* trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 67–68.

as plot, characterisation, irony and conflict as windows into the conceptions of humanity implicit in the text.<sup>72</sup>

### Sydney Cave

Sydney Cave (1944) has a short chapter in a book covering ground similar to the work of Robinson.<sup>73</sup> Like Robinson, Cave does not deal with these Gospels separately. However, unlike Robinson, Cave rightly acknowledges that, in order to form an adequate appreciation of the Gospels' view of humanity, we must look further than the *words* of Jesus: Jesus' *dealings* with people reveal more than his teachings about humanity, for people need healing, not only instruction. Similarly, 'the gravity of sin is exposed less by formal teaching on it than by the way men reacted to the presence with them of the sinless One.'<sup>74</sup> This comment suggests that, for example, Mark's passion narrative, devoid of explicit 'teaching' on the nature of humanity, is (*inter alia*) a graphic depiction of the darkest and most horrible aspects of human nature. Cave also draws attention to narrative details that show that Jesus was fully aware of the human evils of his time. In Mark, for example, there are beggars (10:46), demoniacs (5:2), widows extorted (12:41-44) and authority misused (10:42); all these, illustrating human sin and misery, add to the portrait of humanity in a lost and needy state.

C. Ryder Smith (1951)<sup>75</sup> and Ceslas Spicq (1961)<sup>76</sup> have provided short studies on NT anthropology, but these make no attempt to recover a specifically Markan perspective on humanity, and they consider neither narrativity nor rhetoric.

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<sup>72</sup> Ira Brent Driggers, *Following God Through Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Sydney Cave, *The Christian Estimate of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1944).

<sup>74</sup> Sydney Cave, *Christian Estimate*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> C. Ryder Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Man* (London: Epworth, 1951).

<sup>76</sup> C. Spicq, *Dieu et l'Homme selon le Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1961), 112–47.



## Werner Kümmel

W.G. Kümmel (1948, revised 1963) also mines the synoptic Gospels for Jesus' teaching about humanity.<sup>77</sup> He provides a corrective to Robinson's emphasis on the human being as 'child of God,' pointing out that, in the synoptics, human sonship of God is an eschatological gift (Mt 5:45; Lk 6:35; Lk 20:36) rather than a status afforded by humanity's creation.<sup>78</sup> Kümmel's brief survey draws attention to the synoptic Gospels' portrayal of humanity as God's creatures who must behave according to the order of creation (e.g., Mk 10:6-9), and as servants of the King (implied by *basileia*, though this is not explicit in Mark's Gospel).

Kümmel also addresses Robinson's view (inherited from Harnack) that Jesus puts the highest possible value on man's natural worth.<sup>79</sup> Robinson bases this assertion largely on Mark 8:36-37, but this passage has in view the *eschatological* life, the value of which is inestimably higher than the value of the 'natural' life with its earthly acquisitions.<sup>80</sup>

For Kümmel, Jesus' call for *metanoia* (1:15)—a call that presupposes that all people are somehow characterised by sin and *need* to repent —represents a vision of humanity that is less coloured by liberal optimism than that of Robinson. The ubiquitous prevalence of sin in humanity is a self-evident element in Jesus' view of man, even if not dogmatically formulated.<sup>81</sup> Consistent with this is Jesus' reference to his contemporaries as an 'adulterous and sinful generation' (8:38). Although Kümmel's study is valuable for many insights, he takes the Gospels as a whole, as does Robinson, concentrates almost solely on the common sinfulness of humanity, and gives no attention to narrative and rhetorical aspects.

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<sup>77</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel, *Man in the New Testament*, trans. John J. Vincent (London: Epworth, 1963).

<sup>78</sup> Kümmel, *Man*, 35.

<sup>79</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *Christian Doctrine of Man*, 80–81.

<sup>80</sup> Kümmel, *Man*, 23–24.

<sup>81</sup> Kümmel, *Man*, 19–20.



Moreover, his task is to characterise ‘the person to whom the message of the Gospel comes’.<sup>82</sup> To my mind this is a good starting point for New Testament anthropology, but it must be complemented by a consideration of what I will call ‘eschatological anthropology’—a characterisation of the person who has embraced the message of the Gospel. Since, in both OT and NT, God is the creator, source and maintainer of human life, and the one to whom humanity must relate, all biblical anthropology is necessarily theological.<sup>83</sup> A biblical depiction of humanity is incomplete without a consideration of the dynamics of relationship to God and the hope of transformation.

### **Bas van Iersel**

Bas van Iersel (1972) gives separate attention to Mark’s Gospel in a short but pithy paper in which he seeks ‘anthropological values of such lasting importance that they should continue to act as a critical ferment in the Church’s witness.’<sup>84</sup> The paper is not comprehensive in terms of anthropological categories. It has, however, a strong ethical focus, and this highlights the fact that much of the ‘anthropological’ material in the Gospels is expressed, not in the form of propositions, but as appeals. That is to say, the teachings of Jesus are concerned less often with how humanity *is* than with how it *should be*.<sup>85</sup> Jesus’ appeals function as ‘dynamic rules of human conduct’<sup>86</sup>—dynamic because a pattern of human relationships is presupposed. Van Iersel’s insightful readings of a number of Markan passages highlight Jesus’ teachings that are set in a variety of these relational contexts. Van Iersel rightly concludes that a

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<sup>82</sup> Kümmel, *Man*, 16.

<sup>83</sup> This is well expressed by Ceslas Spicq: ‘L’anthropologie biblique ... n’est concevable que comme une section de la théologie proprement dite: l’organisme humain, la psychologie, aussi bien que la conscience et la vie morale ne sont pensés qu’en fonction de la foi religieuse.’ Spicq, *Dieu et l’Homme selon le Nouveau Testament*, 111.

<sup>84</sup> Bas van Iersel, “The Normative Anthropology of the Gospel,” *Concilium* 5, no. 8 (1972): 48–57 (here, 48).

<sup>85</sup> This important point is made also by Kümmel, *Man*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Van Iersel, “Normative Anthropology,” 52.

fundamental element for a normative view of humanity is an orientation towards the well-being of others. I will take up a discussion of this element in Chapter 5.

Several other important points are made in the paper. The character of Jesus functions as a normative image (i.e., a model) for humanity—an image that, in the eschatological perspective of the Gospels, is coloured to a large degree by the light of the future kingdom of God. Van Iersel summarises all this with a neat observation (his emphases):

The *coming of the kingdom of God* is the indicative which underlies all Jesus' words and actions; *conversion* is the imperative underlying all that the gospel says about man's activity; and *Son of Man* is the name pointing to the man who gave a human aspect to this.<sup>87</sup>

Van Iersel thus reminds us that both christology and eschatology have important implications for anthropology.

### **Udo Schnelle**

Udo Schnelle, writing in 1991, considers that Kümmel's study is still the best introduction to New Testament anthropology. Schnelle's own contribution seeks to supply a gap in the literature with a work that is much more substantial than Kümmel's. His work is a response to the existentialism of Heidegger as appropriated by Bultmann, and takes account of more recent (particularly German) scholarship.<sup>88</sup>

Schnelle provides some valuable insights, highlighting first the gospel vision of humans as creatures: Jesus' concern was the re-establishment of the original order of creation—a concern illustrated by his treatment of the sabbath (Mark 2:23-27; 3:4), of distinctions between clean and unclean (7:15), of marriage (10:2-9) and of healing (as 'a sign and protest against the enslavement of people by evil').<sup>89</sup> Schnelle goes on to recognise Jesus' insistence that humanity is obligated to the will of God (though he fails to cite Mark 3:35 and 14:36 here), and then draws attention to the vision of human beings as people characterised by sin—the 'anthropological

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<sup>87</sup> Van Iersel, "Normative Anthropology," 51.

<sup>88</sup> Schnelle, *Human Condition*.

<sup>89</sup> Schnelle, *Human Condition*, 17.



premise' that lies behind the Gospel call for repentance, a call that he, like Kümmel, claims is the central content of Jesus' proclamation. Finally, Schnelle shows how Jesus' table fellowship with tax-collectors and 'sinners' (ἁμαρτωλοί, 2:14-17) gives expression to a salvation that means acceptance of human beings who are ready to repent. In summary, Jesus' image of humankind is 'a tension-filled intertwining of the message of judgment and the message of grace.'<sup>90</sup> Schnelle's study well illustrates how the Gospels' vision of humanity is inextricably tied up with their eschatological perspective of the presence and the nearness of the kingdom of God: the newness of this kingdom (2:21-22) demands a new hearing of the will of God and a new kind of response.

Unfortunately, like most of those mentioned above, Schnelle's study gives little recognition to the distinctive characteristics of each of the Gospel writers. While his survey is based firmly on historical-critical exegesis, and ostensibly limited to the 'proclamations of Jesus', in fact he recognises that the narratives of Jesus' deeds are as significant for the message of the Gospels as the didactic sections. However, by not treating them in a narrative-critical way, nor giving explicit consideration to rhetorical elements, he misses many of the nuances of Mark's anthropology. So far, then, there remains an anthropological *lacuna* in Markan studies.

### **John Riches**

A recent work exploring aspects of anthropology in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, especially their presentations of Christian identity and change, is John Riches' *Conflicting Mythologies*.<sup>91</sup> Riches' work brings a new dimension to the study of NT anthropology in that it directs attention to the fluidity of anthropological views at the turn of the era. In a sophisticated, wide-ranging and penetrating

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<sup>90</sup> Schnelle, *Human Condition*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> John K. Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).



examination of the two Gospels, Riches advances the thesis that there are two opposing ‘mythologies’ evident in these Gospels. These conflicting mythologies have implications especially for notions relating to the nature, source and ultimate eradication of human evil.

On one view, evil results from demonic invasion of the world: those who sin, sin because they are led astray by the powers of darkness, who control and hold them in bondage. Only rescue from the powers of darkness and their ultimate defeat and destruction can resolve the world’s ills. On another view, sin is the direct result of human disobedience, archetypally represented in Adam, which can be overcome only through the revelation and teaching of God’s will, the institution of punishments and rewards and, ultimately, by the judgement of all.<sup>92</sup>

Riches calls these the ‘cosmic dualist’ view and the ‘forensic’ view. He argues that both views underlie the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The problem for modern Western exegetes is that the two conceptions are in conflict:

It makes a crucial difference whether men and women have gone astray or have been led astray. If it is the latter, then until such time as the powers that lead them astray are destroyed or bound, there can be no peace, no final overthrow of evil. If the former, then there may be time for people to repent, time for them to hear the proclamation of God’s will, and then a time for judgement, when those who have failed to respond will be cast out. These are two separate, opposed conceptions; the intriguing thing is that they are frequently to be found in the same writings.<sup>93</sup>

For Riches, these different perspectives are reflected also in changes in the ways in which Mark (and Matthew) present notions that relate directly to the formation of identity: the concepts of kinship and attachment to ‘sacred space’. Mark modifies the traditional presentation of these notions. In the sphere of ‘cosmic dualism,’ ethnic divisions between Jew and Gentile are dismantled and fictive kinship replaces blood ties; the identity of followers is defined by their relationship to Jesus, who has liberated them from the blindness of dark powers. Traditional ideas of sacred space are also modified: significant and specific sites of final apocalyptic drama (such as Sinai and Jerusalem) are generalised and cosmic in Mark 13. Similarly, in the sphere of the ‘forensic’ view, traditional ideas of Jewish restoration, centred on the holy city of Jerusalem, are replaced by a re-interpreted ‘way of the Lord’ that leads the

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<sup>92</sup> Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, xiii.

<sup>93</sup> Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 267.

Messiah to the cross (and his disciples back to ‘Galilee’) and by ‘blessings for the nations’ mediated through a message that is quite unexpected. Riches summarises:

The close attachment of Jesus’ followers to the Land and its descendants is loosed, and their attachment to him gains prominence. It is no longer physical descent and local attachment which define a person.<sup>94</sup>

Any evaluation of Riches’ study must be appreciative of his fine attempt to unravel, from Mark’s ‘bricolage’ style, the two strands of mythology he identifies, but Riches seems to make too much of what he calls the ‘fundamental opposition’ between them. That they are in tension cannot be denied. In fact, he acknowledges that this kind of tension is characteristic of pre-modern literature in general.<sup>95</sup> Mark focuses on both external and internal evil because both are present realities for him and his audience; neither facet of evil can be sidelined.<sup>96</sup> Both facets are, indeed, fully acknowledged also in Paul’s letters.<sup>97</sup> Evil spirits are very particular in Mark’s Gospel: they affect a few specific people. Internal evil, however, is ubiquitous in humanity generally (7:20-23). Mark is not attempting to argue for one or the other position, but is making use of both. On the one hand (using the cosmic dualistic model) he urges his audience to let Jesus transform them, and on the other hand (using the forensic model) he urges them to take action to be transformed. These rhetorical appeals constitute evidence that Mark believes both models to be valid. They are not alternatives. Rather, the cosmic viewpoint releases and enables the response that is called for in the forensic view: before his audience can take responsive action to follow Jesus they must be released from the power of evil.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 143.

<sup>95</sup> Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 176–9. Cf. the conflict of ‘moral imaginations’ in Job, where Satan plays a leading role in the cosmic drama, and where a ‘forensic’ model gets a good airing and is seriously challenged; see Carol A. Newsom, “Job and His Friends: A Conflict of Moral Imaginations,” *Interpretation* 53 (1999): 239–53.

<sup>96</sup> Marcus had already noted the necessity to see both ‘demonological’ and ‘anthropological’ descriptions as elements of a ‘bifocal epistemology’: Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 62–63.

<sup>97</sup> E.g., 2 Cor 2:11 cf. Gal 5:19-21.

<sup>98</sup> David F. Smith, “Can We Hear What They Heard? The Effect of Orality Upon a Markan Reading-Event,” Ph.D. thesis [University of Durham, 2002], 196) points out that the repentance that Jesus enjoins in 1:15 is not merely an act of will, but is linked to the battle waged in the wilderness on a cosmic scale.



## Denise Steele

The most recent extended study is Denise Steele's 2004 dissertation on Mark's treatment of 'human fruition and the self-in-relation.'<sup>99</sup> Steele examines the text using narrative-critical and reader-response categories, informally rather than comprehensively, but goes beyond these, following her interest in the issues of personhood that she 'extrapolates' from the narrative.<sup>100</sup> Her explorations are anthropological in the sense that they are concerned with the existential experiences and challenges not only of characters in the story but of readers and hearers of the text. Her 'thematic' is the development of the 'self-in-relation,' one of the expressions she borrows from the philosophy of John Macmurray. She takes Mark's purpose to be a paraenetic one: to encourage or maintain his readers in relationship with the hero of his story.<sup>101</sup> She discerns in the Gospel a pattern whereby, through engagement with Jesus and other characters, the reader is encouraged along a path towards what she calls 'gospel selfhood'. In her view, the text charts Jesus' developing relationship with God, a relationship mirrored by minor characters in the narrative. Similarly, the disciples' development of their relationship with Jesus and with God enables the readers also to develop as persons-in-relation as they engage with the experiences of the disciples and become affectively involved. Herod and Pilate are regarded as two rulers who miss their opportunity for self-realisation, but others in opposition to Jesus flatly reject self-realisation. Anticipating charges of anachronistic attention to 'inwardness,' Steele appropriately defends her focus by appealing to other ancient authors, including Paul.

My 'thematic' is similar to Steele's. That is, it treats some dynamics of personal relations as indicated in Mark's Gospel. However, my designation of this as 'transformation' rather than 'development' signals a significant difference. Although the term 'transformation' in one sense lacks the specificity of 'development', I

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<sup>99</sup> Denise Steele, "Having Root in the Self: Human Fruition and the Self-in-Relation in the Gospel of Mark," Ph.D. diss. (University of Glasgow, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Steele, "Having Root," 44.

<sup>101</sup> Steele, "Having Root," 35.



believe it lies closer to the perspective of Mark's Gospel. Steele's 'development' has been (inappropriately, I believe) extrapolated from Mark's text. For example, it is difficult to detect any 'development' of the disciples' understanding and commitment to Jesus after their initial calling, and the experience of the Gerasene demoniac is certainly more appropriately described as a personal transformation than as personal development, as we shall see.

My approach also allows insights from a wider variety of critical approaches to inform the 'thematic'. One limitation of Steele's work is that her approach is fairly strictly 'literary-critical' in the style of New Criticism, treating Mark's Gospel as a text that stands on its own. Consequently she does not deal with intertextual issues, and thereby bypasses some scriptural connections that are valuable pointers to Mark's anthropology. Such intertextuality cannot be ignored, for without an appreciation of the literature that Mark's audience was undoubtedly exposed to (if not actually familiar with) an understanding of the Gospel's impact is diminished. My study concentrates on the identifiable rhetorical features of the text, which certainly acknowledge the affective domain that Steele is concerned with. However, I do not give exclusive attention to the characters in the narrative, but encompass as well elements of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel. I focus in detail on one passage (5:1-20) as a case study. This pericope most closely typifies the dynamics of Mark's theological anthropology, but is dealt with only very briefly by Steele.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Steele, "Having Root," 127-8.

## 1.5 Overview and methodology

Because my investigation of Mark's Gospel has several facets, my selection of tools for the project is eclectic. That is, I use a number of methods, attempting to benefit from a synergy of different approaches to the text.<sup>103</sup>

*Chapter 2* considers the rhetorical features of the Gospel as a whole, with a view to demonstrating the literary and rhetorical tools that carry Mark's message and promote transformation of the reader(s). While duly acknowledging the categories of classical rhetoric, I have chosen not to employ them in my analysis.<sup>104</sup> Instead I have formulated an alternative set of descriptors that is more conducive to the study of the theme of transformation. Each of these is a facet of the overall rhetorical thrust of the Gospel, and each contributes in a unique way to its persuasive power.

*Chapters 3 and 4* focus on the pericope that narrates the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). These chapters illuminate the theme of transformation in the Gospel, and help to lay a foundation for the treatment of Mark's theological anthropology in Chapter 5.

*Chapter 3* is an exegesis of the passage. I treat this account of a dramatic personal transformation as an example of transformative discourse, seeking to show how it impacts its audience in a variety of ways. While utilising the many valuable fruits of historical-critical investigations, my approach is, in the main, a literary one that views the Gospel as a consciously constructed narrative in which the author uses various literary devices for theological and rhetorical purposes. Thus I take account of the concerns of rhetorical and narrative criticism (including intertextuality). I take as given the basic proposition of redaction criticism, that Mark has compiled his

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<sup>103</sup> My approach here is similar to the synthetic methodological perspective of C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 241–48. He writes, 'All of [the various interpretive avenues] have the potential for generating fresh ways of reviewing the Gospel. One should feel no compunction in ... deliberately selecting the vehicle that will best enable him or her to negotiate that particular approach to the Gospel' (246-7).

<sup>104</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 63, observes that 'Mark's rhetoric is not, like Paul's, the rhetoric of oratory, with its logical arguments and emotive appeals. Rather, Mark's is the rhetoric of narrative.'



material from diverse sources of early Christian tradition and crafted it according to his own style and theological interests. While at several points it is enlightening to acknowledge the presence and significance of redactional material, a thoroughgoing identification of redactional activity is not a concern of this project.<sup>105</sup>

Having made observations about the literary, thematic and rhetorical aspects of Mark 5:1-20, I then examine the placement of the passage in its narrative and rhetorical context within the Gospel. In *Chapter 4* I utilise another set of categories that relate not to the techniques of the rhetoric but to its content. That is, I identify several themes that are not only present in 5:1-20 but are also woven through the Gospel. By this method it is possible to evaluate how Mark 5:1-20 works rhetorically within the framework of the Gospel, and to identify some possible ‘reader responses’ to the story. This is not to imply that I am doing ‘reader-response criticism’ as such, for that approach is properly the analysis of responses made by contemporary (modern-day) readers who are ‘text-transcendent’, that is, not so much concerned with history as with their own present construction of meaning.<sup>106</sup> Rather, I aim to identify some likely responses of Mark’s first-century readers to his rhetoric; this approach is similar to those of Beavis,<sup>107</sup> Incigneri<sup>108</sup> and Bolt.<sup>109</sup>

In an attempt to remain within the horizon of Mark’s narrative, I have chosen to bracket out interpretations that rely heavily on psychological and sociological concepts. However, I will consider them briefly in Chapter 6 as potential components of present-day responses to the text.

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<sup>105</sup> There remain considerable differences of opinion in regard to the extent of redaction of the Gospel and of this pericope in particular. E.g., Rudolf Pesch, “The Markan Version of the Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac,” *Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 349–76, views Mark’s own contribution as minimal; Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origin* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), lies at the other extreme. Jostein Ådna, “The Encounter of Jesus with the Gerasene Demoniac,” in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 279–301, following Franz Annen, takes a medial position. For a detailed bibliography see W.R. Telford, *Writing on the Gospel of Mark* (Blandford Forum: Deo, forthcoming).

<sup>106</sup> See the discussion by Stanley E. Porter, “Why Hasn’t Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?” *Journal of Literature and Theology* 4, no. 3 (November 1990): 278–92.

<sup>107</sup> Beavis, *Mark’s Audience*.

<sup>108</sup> Incigneri, *Gospel*.

<sup>109</sup> Peter G. Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark’s Early Readers* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).



*Chapter 5* is an extended reflection on the dynamic theological anthropology of the Gospel. Using the findings of the previous two chapters, I construct a synthetic (and to some extent systematic) overview of Mark's vision of humanity, both individual and communal. By isolating anthropological elements in this way the contours of human transformation may more clearly be seen. While aiming to be sensitive to Mark's historical context, I have found it helpful to borrow, from recent theories of reading, the literary term 'model reader'.

*Chapter 6* is a brief theological reflection in which I draw particular attention to the 'transformative potential' of the rhetoric and anthropology of Mark's Gospel, and to the means of its appropriation by historical and contemporary readers. This discussion is followed by a summary of my argument and an evaluation of the relevance of my project for Markan studies.

My goal overall is to fill a gap in Markan studies by highlighting the contours of the transformative potential of the Gospel, specifying elements of the rhetorical means by which transformation of the reader is promoted, and showing how the rhetoric is linked with a dynamic eschatological anthropology.

## CHAPTER 2

### MARK'S GOSPEL AS TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOURSE

#### Introduction

This chapter deals with some important elements of Mark's rhetorical interests. It provides further evidence for my contention, outlined in the previous chapter, that the Gospel of Mark aims to transform its audience in certain ways. That is, the author presents his story of Jesus in such a way that his readers/hearers are challenged to accept it and change. In this chapter I examine the text as a multi-faceted work that has employed narrative and rhetorical techniques in its crafting. My aim is to highlight the contours of the text as a discourse directed towards particular kinds of transformation of its readers. This chapter also prepares the way for a close investigation of the episode of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20.

#### Defining rhetoric

Although George Kennedy reminds us that all literature is 'rhetorical' in the sense that its function is to affect a reader in some way,<sup>1</sup> literary works vary in the extent to which their rhetorical power is evident. Aristotle defined rhetoric simply as the art of persuasion; it is 'the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever'.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Quintilian, preferred a broader definition: 'the art of speaking well'.<sup>3</sup> Modern definitions generally expand the Aristotelian emphasis to include written texts and also to give a more explicit reference to the audience. Thus Patrick and Scult define rhetoric as 'the means by

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<sup>1</sup> George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese, LCL (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1.2.1.

<sup>3</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, LCL (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 2.17.37.

which a text establishes and manages its relationship to its audience in order to achieve a particular effect.’<sup>4</sup> Corbett’s definition states more fully the possibilities: ‘the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience’.<sup>5</sup> This is an appropriate definition by which to consider the rhetoric of Mark’s Gospel, for two reasons. First, it acknowledges both the reading and hearing situations in which a discourse may be actualised. Second, it allows for a degree of complexity in the purpose of a discourse. As I showed in Chapter 1, both of these factors are relevant to a consideration of Mark’s Gospel.

### **Narrative rhetoric and authorial intention**

It is now accepted that a narrative usually performs a rhetorical function. That is, a narrator may desire to effect a certain response in the hearer/reader, and to this purpose may tailor the way the story is told.<sup>6</sup> In this scenario there is a real authorial intentionality that gives validity to the use of the phrase ‘rhetorical strategy’. Although it is sometimes possible to identify a rhetoric that is inherent in the content and structure of the text, making no claims on the intent of the author,<sup>7</sup> scholars of Mark’s Gospel universally assume its authorial intentionality, regardless of their opinion about its specific purpose. Craig Evans, for example, argues that Mark’s Gospel is primarily bold apologetic; it is written ‘to narrate the story of Jesus *in such a way* that such a confession [of Jesus as Son of God, humanity’s true Saviour and

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<sup>4</sup> Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>5</sup> E.P.J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 3.

<sup>6</sup> The literature on narrative rhetoric is now substantial. The publication of Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) was the stimulus for a whole new area for the study of biblical narrative. The pioneering work was Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981). For further bibliography see James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1996) and James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Booth writes, ‘The success of an author’s rhetoric does not depend on whether he thought about his readers as he wrote; if “mere calculation” cannot insure success, it is equally true that even the most unconscious and Dionysian of writers succeeds only if he makes us join in the dance.’ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, second ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), xiv.



Lord, in contrast with the Emperor] *will appear compelling and plausible* to Jews and Romans alike.’<sup>8</sup> Such a comment acknowledges the presence of a rhetorical goal and the demonstration of rhetorical competency on the part of the Gospel’s author. Since we are not in a position to know Mark’s *actual* intention, we must be content to identify only what *appears* to be his intention. In any case, the potential of his text to influence his audience has been widely recognised.

### Recognition of Mark’s Gospel as rhetoric

Even before the rise of narrative and reader-oriented criticism, William Lane (1974) made this comment:

[Mark’s use of literary devices] was designed to keep men from a spectator relationship to what Jesus said or did. They are called by the evangelist to stand where Jesus stood, and where he stands. [Mark was concerned] *to involve men in the crisis of decision* prompted by Jesus’ presence.<sup>9</sup>

George A. Kennedy (1984) calls the Gospel of Mark an example of ‘radical Christian rhetoric’ characterised by assertion and absolute claims of authoritative truth, rather than by logical or reasoned argument; it stands in contrast with Matthew’s and Paul’s ‘more rationalising rhetoric’.<sup>10</sup> Kennedy assesses Mark’s style in the light of classical rhetoric, but misses (as we shall see) the subtler elements uncovered by slightly later scholars who take a more reader-oriented perspective. A pioneer amongst these has been Robert Fowler; his reader-response study *Loaves and Fishes* (1981)<sup>11</sup> and his later work *Let the Reader Understand* (1991)<sup>12</sup> have been very influential. Paul Achtemeier (1992) speaks for a wide range of scholars when he maintains:

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<sup>8</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, WBC, Vol. 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), xciii (my emphases).

<sup>9</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 27 (my emphasis)

<sup>10</sup> George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 104–07.

<sup>11</sup> Robert M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Fowler, *Reader*.

One of Mark's theological goals ... was to move his readers from observers to participants, and thus to move them to share in the gospel whose beginnings he had narrated in his account of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>13</sup>

Joel Williams (1994) agrees that 'at least in part, Mark wrote his narrative in order to move the reader toward a fitting response to Jesus'.<sup>14</sup> There is now wide acceptance of the kind of approach to Mark's Gospel that recognises it as a document that, in common with much ancient literature,<sup>15</sup> has a rhetorical function. In the words of Elizabeth Malbon, the Gospel is 'a sermon, written from the persuaded to be persuasive'.<sup>16</sup>

### Previous studies on Mark's Gospel as rhetoric

The literature on Mark's strategies of persuasion has been growing steadily, and many commentators have identified literary techniques used by the author of the Gospel in the attempt to engage, persuade and move its readers. The perspectives of both rhetorical criticism and reader-response criticism inform such studies.

Amos Wilder, a seminal contributor to the rhetorical study of the Gospels, draws attention particularly to the novel features of New Testament texts, compared with those of classical rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> David Rhoads' 1982 narrative-critical study, *Mark as Story* pioneered approaches to Mark's Gospel as rhetoric.<sup>18</sup> His second edition (1999) gives greater attention to the 'ideal reader', and proposes that the story seeks to transform the reader through three movements that correlate with the three main

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<sup>13</sup> Achtemeier, "Mark," 556.

<sup>14</sup> Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 89.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, "How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 349.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1964). For a convincing demonstration of the relevance of Hellenistic rhetorical theory to the synoptic sayings traditions, see Burton L. Mack and Vernon K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).



sections of the Gospel.<sup>19</sup> Vernon Robbins identifies progressive, repetitive and conventional rhetorical forms present in the Gospel at the level of the pericope and also, more significantly, at the level of the overall composition.<sup>20</sup> In a later article, Robbins sees the Gospel as ‘prophetic discourse’, an interweaving of apocalyptic, miracle, wisdom and ‘suffering-death’ types of discourse.<sup>21</sup>

I will draw on the influential work of Robert Fowler at several points. Fowler, following Chatman, distinguishes between the ‘story’ and ‘discourse’ levels of the text.<sup>22</sup> Mark’s Gospel, in common with much biblical narrative, including the other Gospels,<sup>23</sup> exhibits a ‘double horizon’: at one level (the ‘story level’, i.e., as historical narrative) it purports simply to tell the story of Jesus and his disciples, while at another level (the ‘discourse level’, i.e., as rhetoric) it is directed transparently towards the readers—in the first instance, the readers that the author knows are going to receive the text. It interprets the story, attempts to engage the readers and to move the readers to respond. There is thus a pressure on the audience at the ‘discourse level.’

John G. Cook’s text-linguistic analysis identifies Mark 1:1 as the ‘governing speech act’ that uses the concept of ‘gospel’ to draw readers into the world of the text and encourage them to accept the text as good news.<sup>24</sup> Robert Humphrey’s analysis considers the Gospel’s rhetorical effect to be founded on the narrative

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<sup>19</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story (2nd Ed.)*, 137–46. In Mk 1-8 readers experience the power of Jesus’ deeds and are motivated to follow him; in 9-10 they are challenged with the expectations and costs of discipleship; in Jerusalem (11-16) they experience Jesus’ trial and crucifixion from Mark’s insider perspective, seeing Jesus as a model of how to face fearful persecution and death with courage.

<sup>20</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, “The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the Gospel of Mark,” in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament*, ed. Duane F. Watson (Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 44.

<sup>22</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, ch. 1.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, David B. Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> John G. Cook, *The Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark: A Linguistic Approach* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

structure in which the audience will recognise three ‘key narrative moments’.<sup>25</sup> Other scholars have dealt with particular aspects of Mark’s rhetoric (e.g., Camery-Hoggatt on irony<sup>26</sup> and Danove on characterisation<sup>27</sup>) while several have reported on rhetorical elements in specific passages (e.g., LaHurd on the Gerasene demoniac,<sup>28</sup> Evans on Jesus’ ‘critical’ parables,<sup>29</sup> and Borrell on Peter’s denial.<sup>30</sup>).

Reader-response commentaries include those of Heil<sup>31</sup> and van Iersel.<sup>32</sup> Both of these focus on the reception of the text by *modern* readers. Peter Bolt’s valuable study *Jesus’ Defeat of Death* (2003) seeks to assess the narrative impact of Mark’s Gospel on its *early* (i.e., first-century) readers; as such, it is an ‘exercise in literary reception’ that is similar to my own with regard to the rhetorical effects of the text.<sup>33</sup> Bolt is particularly interested in the healing/exorcism stories, and his method appropriately attempts to elucidate the rich first-century ‘cultural repertoire’ that informs his construction of probable audience reactions. My own analysis, on the other hand, approaches the rhetoric more thematically, and integrates it with the anthropological elements of the Gospel.

More recently, David Rhoads and others have drawn attention to the rhetoric associated with the *oral* performance of Mark’s Gospel.<sup>34</sup> Whitney Shiner attempts

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<sup>25</sup> Humphrey, *Narrative Structure*. These are 1:1-13 (including Jesus’ baptism), 8:27-9:13 (including Jesus’ transfiguration) and 14:1-16:8 (the passion narrative); each section includes themes related to Jesus’ identity, death/resurrection, apocalyptic symbolism and temptation.

<sup>26</sup> Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark’s Gospel: Text and Subtext* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Paul L. Danove, *The Rhetoric of the Characterisation of God, Jesus and Jesus’ Disciples in the Gospel of Mark* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Carol Schersten LaHurd, “Reader Response to Ritual Elements in Mk 5:1–20,” *BTB* 20 (1990): 154–60.

<sup>29</sup> Craig A. Evans, “Jesus’ Rhetoric of Criticism: The Parables Against His Friends and Critics,” in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible*, Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 256–79.

<sup>30</sup> Agustí Borrell, *The Good News of Peter’s Denial: A Narrative and Rhetorical Reading of Mark 14:54, 66–72* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Bas van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, JSNTS (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 27.

<sup>33</sup> Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Rhoads, *Reading Mark*; Malbon, *Hearing Mark*.



to identify text segments that function as ‘applause markers’ for a live audience.<sup>35</sup> Many of these studies highlight ways in which Mark aims to move the reader, but none seems to take an overall view of the kinds of transformations implied by the Gospel. In preparation for my exploration of these transformations, I elaborate below some methods by which the rhetorical function of the Gospel seems to have been promoted.

### Some rhetorical facets of Mark’s Gospel

The three ‘species’ of classical rhetoric—forensic (judicial), deliberative (political) and epideictic (praise/blame)—are well known.<sup>36</sup> These different types of rhetoric seek different kinds of response from their audiences, but their use in the analysis of the Gospels is of limited value. Scholars consider that the definitions of these categories are quite narrow, and so they have been cautious in applying the categories to NT documents.<sup>37</sup> It seems clear that Mark wants to enable his audience to judge rightly concerning the events of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection (a ‘forensic’ aim) while exhorting them to future action on the basis of a response of faith (a deliberative aim) and at the same time influencing and affirming Christian beliefs and values (an epideictic aim). Thus Mark’s purpose seems wider than any one of these three generic categories.

Other ways of analysing classical rhetoric, though, seem to be more applicable to the Gospels. Aristotle recognised and expounded on three components of the rhetorical process that did not comprise a classification system like the three ‘species’, but were categories descriptive of the construction and performance of rhetorical presentations.<sup>38</sup> These were invention (*heuresis*), arrangement (*taxis*) and style (*lexis*). Other rhetoricians, notably the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,

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<sup>35</sup> Whitney Taylor Shiner, “Applause and Applause Lines in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Rhetorics and Hermeneutics*, ed. James D. Hester and J. David Hester (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 129–44.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 1.3.1–6.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Richard A. Burridge, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 BC - AD 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 510.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Book 3.

quickly saw the importance of two more components: memory (*mnēmē*) and delivery (*hypokrisis*). By the turn of the era, these five ‘parts’ of the rhetorical process were widely recognised.<sup>39</sup>

These categories suggest some possible approaches to the Gospels as rhetorical works. Are these categories evident, for example, in Mark’s Gospel? And is such a scheme helpful in the analysis of its rhetoric? Stimulated by Richard Burridge’s sketch along these lines,<sup>40</sup> I look briefly now at each of the five categories as they might be applied to Mark’s Gospel.

### 1. *Invention*

Invention is the discovery (*heuresis*) of resources for discursive persuasion. There are two considerations here. One is the subject matter, including people and events. In the case of Mark’s Gospel, the subject matter is the person of Jesus, together with the events of his life and death (the latter a *topos* of major importance, comprising approximately one third of the Gospel). However, the classical *encomium*, normally specifying the subject’s citizenship, ancestry and family, is missing. The other Gospels, of course, seek in different ways to supply this lack.

The other aspect of ‘invention’ is the means of persuasion used. Classical rhetors included here the presentation of the speaker’s character (*ethos*) as trustworthy, the logical argument (*logos*) used to convince the audience, and the emotion (*pathos*) that the speaker might awaken in the audience. Although Mark’s means of persuasion are manifold, and are the concern of the present chapter, they do not appear to fall easily into the classical categories. The narrator himself is hidden, and it is the character of Jesus who is shown to be trustworthy. The narrator’s agenda is far from explicit, and instead, logical argument is placed on the lips of Jesus as he teaches. As for emotion, Mark seems little interested in exploiting

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<sup>39</sup> For helpful elaborations on these, see the relevant articles in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 BC - AD 400* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Burridge, “Gospels.”



opportunities for working up the feelings of his audience; he lets the inherent emotional power of the narrative do its work.

## 2. *Arrangement*

Arrangement refers to the ordering of the parts—the organisation of the material into discrete divisions, typically including (in a Graeco-Roman scheme) the introduction, narration, ‘proofs’ (*pisteis*) and conclusion. Although Mark’s Gospel consists largely of chronological narration, and follows patterns broadly similar to those found in ancient biographical works, there is very little introduction, and no formal prologue. Jesus’ miracles function as ‘proofs’ and are provided throughout the first two-thirds of the Gospel, with the resurrection of Jesus functioning as the final ‘proof’. BurrIDGE points out that the patterns and methods of Jewish story-telling are discernible in the text, and comments that it is unrealistic to expect adherence to a classical rhetorical scheme in such a syncretistic culture.<sup>41</sup> However, it is clear that Mark’s Gospel has been arranged with considerable thought, as evidenced, for example, by the repeated occurrence of ‘series of three’<sup>42</sup> and ‘three-step progressions’.<sup>43</sup>

## 3. *Style*

Style denotes the *way* in which things are spoken. It is concerned with the choice of language (words, sentences, figures, etc.) that will be most effective in communicating the material. As I will show below, the use of metaphor and ‘direct address’ are major features of Mark’s Gospel.

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<sup>41</sup> BurrIDGE, “Gospels,” 521.

<sup>42</sup> Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 19–22. Robbins identifies 16 strings of three items linked by καί; also Peter’s three-fold denial of Jesus (14:66–72) and the thrice-repeated actions in Gethsemane (14:32–42).

<sup>43</sup> Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 19–51. The passion predictions constitute the clearest example of this structure. Robbins (197–209) also identifies repetitive forms (e.g., the repeated pattern whereby Jesus’ teaching and healing results in people coming to him), conventional forms (e.g., those associated with biblical prophets and disciple-gathering teachers) and progressive forms (integrated rhetorical movements that introduce a thesis, demonstrate it and call for response).

#### 4. *Memory*

Memory refers, of course, to the memorisation of a speech, but also includes the acquisition of a repository of a variety of material that might be appropriately drawn on in improvisatory circumstances. Both of these were requirements for an effective oral presentation. We do not have access to the materials Mark used in his composition, but it is highly probable that memory played a major role in the oral transmission of traditions about Jesus.

#### 5. *Delivery*

Delivery is concerned with the control of the voice (pitch, volume, rhythm, etc.) and with gestures that the rhetor might use. The urgency of Mark's narration, his spare style and episodic structure all hint strongly that the text is intended to be delivered orally as a continuous whole.<sup>44</sup>

Burridge's work demonstrates clearly that, while these five rhetorical categories have some applicability to Mark's Gospel, their usefulness in a rhetorical analysis of the Gospel is limited. It would seem more appropriate to approach the rhetoric of the Gospel in terms more intrinsic to it. By this I mean that, while the categories of formal Greco-Roman rhetoric may certainly be *identified* in Mark's Gospel, they are blunt instruments for delineating the multiple thematic contours of Mark's rhetoric. Amos Wilder considered that the novelty and creativity of Jesus' words and deeds constituted a 'new utterance':

... a new departure, not just in the sense of a new religious teaching, but rather the opening up of a new dimension of man's awareness, a new breakthrough in language and symbolisation.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Burridge, "Gospels," 528. See also David F. Smith, "Can We Hear?"

<sup>45</sup> Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 18. A study by Ben F. Meyer ("How Jesus Charged Language with Meaning: A Study in Rhetoric," in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 81–96) explores ways in which Jesus himself was a rhetorician, making use of *phanopoeia* (the evocation of sharp visual images), *melopoeia* (the orchestration of sound) and *logopoeia* (the exploitation of resonances latent in the listener's memory).



Wilder implies that, for Mark, the newness and power of the message necessitated a new subgenre, which he called *euangelion*, and the new ‘speech-event’ contained within itself new means of persuasion as well. I have therefore chosen to rearrange the rubric under which I explore Mark’s rhetoric. I have called them ‘rhetorical facets’ to indicate that they are not intended to comprise a comprehensive or formal scheme of analysis. These ‘facets’ are not all equivalent in weight, but are different ways of approaching the rhetorical character of the text. However, my headings are not unrelated to the categories just discussed.

The Gospel brings into prominence two major components of *invention*: the deeds and the spoken words of its main character, Jesus. Both of these are rhetorically rich in different ways, and so I treat them as separate categories, which I have labelled ‘the rhetoric of demonstration’ and ‘the rhetoric of instruction’. Emotion as a means of persuasion (another aspect of ‘invention’) is treated in the section on ‘the rhetoric of performance’.

A consideration of the overall *arrangement* of Mark’s Gospel is part of my project in Chapter 4, where I will give some attention to the placement of narrative and didactic passages, and to the rhetorical effects of such placements. I will therefore not discuss the rhetoric of arrangement in the present chapter.

Two aspects of Mark’s *style* appear to be particularly effective as rhetorical elements, and I treat these separately. One is what I have called (following Fowler) ‘the rhetoric of indirection’, under which heading I explore the use of such stylistic elements as ambiguity and opacity. The other is the extended metaphor of blindness and deafness, a pervasive and powerful figure in the Gospel.

*Memory* and *delivery* are factors relating to the oral presentation of the text, and so I treat them together as ‘the rhetoric of performance’. Included here is the element of emotion (*pathos*) which, though by no means absent from a non-dramatic or private individual reading, is considerably heightened in a performance mode. An extra consideration is Mark’s designation of his whole work as εὐαγγέλιον (good

news). I treat this first, as ‘the rhetoric of proclamation’, because it is likely to grab the readers’ attention at the very beginning of the text.

I will present here, then, six ways of viewing the rhetoric of the Gospel. The examination of each of these rhetorical facets will lead to the discovery of several ways in which the hearer/reader is being persuaded to change. By elucidating the extent to which each literary method promotes the transformation of the reader, and by viewing the effects of the various rhetorical elements as cumulative, we can build up a picture of the kinds of transformation envisaged by the (author of the) Gospel of Mark.

## 2.1 The rhetoric of proclamation: ‘good news’

The first indication of the rhetorical flavour of Mark’s Gospel occurs in the first sentence: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:1). Mark chooses to designate his whole work as εὐαγγέλιον. This word establishes strongly, right at the outset, the character of the central content of the text.<sup>46</sup> Fowler considers this pivotal word to be ‘the pre-eminent characterisation of both the story level and the discourse level’.<sup>47</sup> The word is repeated in vv. 14 and 15, so forming an *inclusio* around the introductory section. In 1:14 τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ represents the message proclaimed by Jesus, while 1:15 specifies appropriate responses to that message.

### The meaning of εὐαγγέλιον

The word is not to be translated as ‘gospel’, as if that were a title or an established generic description. Here εὐαγγέλιον is not yet a technical term for a literary form,

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<sup>46</sup> Carl Classen’s rhetorical analysis of Mark’s introductory section (1:1-15) highlights the use of terms that are central for Mark’s message: the ‘good tidings’ of the Spirit-anointed Christ, as promised by the prophets, the Messiah who brings remission of sins and salvation, through repentance. Carl Joachim Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 74–75.

<sup>47</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 90.



although it became such in the second century. Rather, it is to be understood as a message of ‘good news’.<sup>48</sup> For Mark as for Paul, to whom Mark may be indebted for the use of the term (cf. 1 Thess 1:5; 2:2, 4, etc.), it does not denote a teaching or ongoing instruction for the church, but a proclamation to anyone who will listen, for in both pagan and Jewish Greek literature, εὐαγγελ- consistently connotes an announcement of any significant or joyous news—an act of proclamation which is ‘news’ to the hearer.<sup>49</sup> It refers to an historical event that introduces a new situation for the world.<sup>50</sup> Its OT background is בשר, which has a similar range of proclaiming good news, especially of Israel’s victory or God’s victory. By association with the use of the cognate verb εὐαγγελίζω in Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 60:6; and 61:1, the ‘good news’ is imminent salvation. In Hellenistic literature εὐαγγέλιον often refers to a victory; Mark uses it significantly and appropriately in 1:14-15, where it comes directly after the successful outcome of Jesus’ power struggle with Satan (1:13).<sup>51</sup>

### **Transformation through ‘good news’**

Good news is to be proclaimed. It announces a positive change in a situation or set of circumstances or state of things, and is expected to have a positive effect on those who hear it. Proclamation of the ‘good news’ is echoed throughout Mark’s story. It is one of the central features of Jesus’ activity (1:14, 38, 39; 2:2). In addition, the disciples are to go and proclaim (κηρύσσω) this ‘good news’, with the evidence of what they have seen and heard (3:13-14; 5:20; 6:7-13; 13:10; 14:9). It is clear, then, that Mark uses the word εὐαγγέλιον to refer both to the preaching *of* Jesus and preaching *about* Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See further Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (London: A&C Black, 1991), 33.

<sup>49</sup> John P. Dickson, “Gospel as News: εὐαγγελ- From Aristophanes to the Apostle Paul,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 212–30.

<sup>50</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Leander Keck, “The Introduction to Mark’s Gospel,” *NTS* 12 (1966): 361.

<sup>52</sup> Herman Hendrickx, *The Miracle Stories of the Synoptic Gospels* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 38.

Why proclaim this message? Mark never answers this question directly; the motivation must be deduced. What is clear is the author's estimation of Jesus: he is Messiah and Son of God. The corollary is also clear: he is worthy to be followed. For example, the stories of Jesus' healing of blindness and deafness clearly imply that Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophetic Isaianic scriptures that promise 'sight to the blind' as one of the indications of eschatological deliverance (e.g., Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:6-7).<sup>53</sup> However, Leander Keck is correct to note that what makes the story of Jesus 'good news' for Mark is not who Jesus is in himself, but who he is *for us*.<sup>54</sup> That is, the reader has a personal interest in the message of the book. Fowler writes that '1:14-15 is an admission by the narrator of what he wants to happen to the reader in the course of the reading experience.' That is, Mark's presentation is such that his own rhetorical goal is hidden in the rhetorical goal of Jesus: that people should repent and believe in this good news (1:15).<sup>55</sup>

The 'good news' is set in the context of the fulfilment of prophecy. The words of 'Isaiah the prophet' provide a striking opening for Mark's narrative (1:2-3) and John the Baptist announces a new prophecy: 'He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit' (1:8). Then Jesus appears with the announcement that 'the time is fulfilled' (1:15). These prophetic themes generate and reinforce a sense of expectation for the reader.<sup>56</sup> 'Good news' constitutes a set of answers to a set of perceived problems. It implies cause for rejoicing in relief and release. In the Isaianic context which is

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<sup>53</sup> Mark is not explicit in identifying Jesus as the fulfilment of these prophecies; the other synoptists are much more pointed (e.g., Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22). For explorations of the rich intertextuality of Mark's Gospel with Isaiah, particularly with respect to blindness and 'the way', see Joel Marcus, "Mark and Isaiah," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman*, ed. Astrid B. Beck and others (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 449–66; Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) and Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Keck, "Introduction," 364.

<sup>55</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 90, 91.

<sup>56</sup> P.J. Sankey, "Promise and Fulfilment: Reader-Response to Mark 1:1–15," *JSNT* 58 (1995): 16.



evoked by Mark's introduction, it implies liberation for 'exiles', restoration for outcasts, and the reign of God, engendering hope that anticipates change.<sup>57</sup> Malbon's deft crystallisation of the impact of the Gospel is worth citing:<sup>58</sup>

It is good news of the kingdom of God breaking into the world.  
It is good news for an inclusive community beyond restrictive boundaries.  
It is good news of daring discipleship that manifests God's love in startling ways.  
It is good news of God's presence through life, suffering, death and beyond.

What kinds of transformation are in view here? Initially, there is the kind of perceptual transformation that is fundamental to prophecy and apocalyptic: the seer visualises a new set of future circumstances and proclaims the vision. Then, having been communicated, the 'good news' is to be believed (1:15); there is an implicit call here for a change in the content or character of belief. Thirdly, this call for belief is associated with the call for repentance, which, if actualised, will lead not only to inner changes in one's orientation to God, but also to observable changes in behaviour.

### **Repentance and baptism: John's penitents**

In the opening scene of the Gospel (1:1-15) we see a great mass of people ('all the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem') confessing their sins and being baptised by John in the Jordan River. These people have heard John's call to 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins' and have responded in droves. What does this response signify? The repentance (μετάνοια) called for here is a change of attitude, and a radical one at that—a 'complete reversal of one's mindset'<sup>59</sup>—a return to a way of life that is in accord with 'the way of the Lord' implied in John's preaching. It is well known that the notion signified by the verb μετανοέω, as it is

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<sup>57</sup> E.g., Isa 40:9; 52:7-10; 61:1-3.

<sup>58</sup> Malbon, *Hearing Mark*.

<sup>59</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 13.

used in the NT and in Hellenistic Jewish literature, lies close to the meaning of שׁוּב, as it is used by the OT prophets (e.g., Isa 55:7), implying an inner change—a conversion of the heart. The ritual purification of baptism symbolises a moral purification in which relationship with God is restored. It is not an individualistic rite, since it implies a return to faithful membership of the people of God.<sup>60</sup> However, the efficacy of this baptism pales in comparison with that to be administered by the ‘coming one’—‘he who is mightier’ (1:7). John promises a more extensive transformation, mediated by the one who will ‘baptise with the Holy Spirit’ and so inaugurate the eschatological age.<sup>61</sup>

Mark thus begins his Gospel with a scene portraying a radical response to prophetic proclamation, evidenced by turning to God in penitence. This beginning seems to have a rhetorical intention. Lane comments that, by opening his narrative in this way, Mark ‘recreates for his own contemporaries the crisis of decision with which John had confronted all Israel.’<sup>62</sup> In 1:5 we see the first occurrence of πάντες, a word that Mark often uses with a sense inclusive of the audience.<sup>63</sup> Even before Jesus makes his entrance, Mark’s audience is challenged, by the overwhelming response of John’s penitents, to consider the orientation of their own lives towards God. Moreover, they are encouraged, through the promise of the Spirit, to expect (or to recall) their own transformation.<sup>64</sup>

Mark will continue to press the necessity for μετάνοια, as it features not only in the preaching of Jesus (1:15) and the disciples (6:12) but also (by implication) in

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<sup>60</sup> Bilhah Nitzan notes that repentance played a central role in the renewal of covenant relationships between God and Israel in post-exilic writings and especially at Qumran (e.g., 1QS 5:22), where repentance was ‘a way of life’. Bilhah Nitzan, “Repentance in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 146.

<sup>61</sup> The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is a key element of eschatological expectation in the Hebrew scriptures: see Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:25-7; 39:29; Joel 2:28f.

<sup>62</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Mark 1:27, 32; 5:20; 11:18; 13:37; 14:27, 31, 50.

<sup>64</sup> The promise of Holy Spirit baptism here helps to ‘create and progressively reinforce a sense of expectation’ for the reader of the Gospel, according to Sankey, “Promise,” 16.



Jesus' repeated calls throughout the Gospel for reorientation to the values of the kingdom of God. For example, his charge to the Pharisees and scribes, that they are neglecting the commandments of God and holding to human traditions, is an implicit call to reverse this stance (7:5-9). Of similar character are his calls, in various forms, to self-denial (8:33-38; 9:43-48; 10:15; 10:23)

To summarise, the characterisation of the whole work as εὐαγγέλιον has itself strong rhetorical implications. The 'good news' is to be believed, acted upon, and shared. It is a medium of transformation. Its announcement is an important, indeed foundational, element of the transformative discourse of Mark's Gospel.

## **2.2 The rhetoric of demonstration: transformations observed**

At the beginning of his story, Mark strings together a number of diverse healing events that serve as examples that demonstrate Jesus' deeds in a 'day' of activity (1:21-34). As in any story in which lots of things happen, change is a notable feature of Mark's Gospel. At the 'story' level, the narrative tells of many changes in people: sick persons are healed, demon-possessed persons are liberated, some people become followers of Jesus and others become his enemies. Here I address the proposition that there is a rhetorical relationship between changes in the characters of the story and processes of response and transformation that the audience is invited to engage in.

### **Changes in characters: the 'story' level**

It can certainly be argued that the stories of wondrous changes wrought in characters by Jesus have an important christological function in demonstrating certain

propositions about him.<sup>65</sup> For example, the first exorcism (1:21-28) raises the question of Jesus' authority and identity. However, my use of the expression 'rhetoric of demonstration' here focuses rather on the rhetorical value of these changes in demonstrating (for the audience) that people can be transformed by contact with Jesus. Balancing this possibility on the negative side are various demonstrations of resistance to transformation shown by certain characters in the story. It is hardly necessary to catalogue these changes in any detail, because examples abound and lie quite obviously on the 'surface' of the text. Some, like the physical healings, are changes in the 'exterior' characteristics of the persons changed, and some are changes that are more 'interior', like changes in perception; all of them, however, have observable manifestations. They demonstrate 'real ontological change, a radical restructuring and redistribution of the very stuff of life'.<sup>66</sup> These types of change are not mutually exclusive but interdependent. For example, interior changes may be responses to exterior changes, and *vice versa*.

### **Effects on the audience: the 'discourse' level**

What is the relationship between the characters in a story and the audience who hear it? Might changes that occur in a character in a story cause changes in the attitude or behaviour of the audience? Based on our own experience of reading texts, we intuit that readers engage both cognitively and affectively with stories. They are moved as they become involved in the plot, and they 'identify' with characters.

The dynamics of audience involvement, both intellectual and emotional, were well known to classical writers. For example, Aristotle writes of the arousal of

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, the excellent work of Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 197–209.

<sup>66</sup> Mark McVann, "Dwelling Among the Tombs: Discourse, Discipleship and the Gospel of Mark 4:35–5:43," Ph.D. diss. (Emory University, 1984), 193.



fear and pity in the audience of a tragedy.<sup>67</sup> In other contexts the rhetorical use of examples, both positive and negative, was recommended as a powerfully persuasive tool.<sup>68</sup>

The power of all drama is the possibility of vicarious experience through that of the characters. The reader is able to ‘project himself into the story’<sup>69</sup> and, by means of that participation, to ‘try on’ the experiences of the characters. In so doing, there is the possibility that one’s own experience (outside the story) may be transformed. Readers are drawn to characters with whom they have something in common, and develop with them (consciously or unconsciously) a continuing relationship on both thinking and feeling levels.<sup>70</sup> The reader may be led to sympathise, to empathise, to feel some communal attachment to characters, to emulate them or to judge them.<sup>71</sup>

It would be interesting to consider more exactly the psychological mechanisms by which these processes might work, but such a question is beyond the scope of this project. It is possible, however, to observe how a story has been told, and to identify factors which appear likely to impact the audience in significant ways.

### **‘Identification’ with changed characters**

Amos Wilder makes the point that the question of identification arises with every story we read; thus the Gospel stories are always about us—they await our response,

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<sup>67</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, LCL (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 14.1.

<sup>68</sup> Marie Noël Keller, “Opening Blind Eyes: A Revisioning of Mark 8:22–10:52,” *BTB* 31 (2001): 152–53, cites Aristotle (e.g., *The Art of Rhetoric* 2.20.1394a.9) and Anaximenes (e.g., *Rhet. Alex.* 32.1438b.29–31).

<sup>69</sup> Steele, “Having Root,” 154.

<sup>70</sup> Steele, “Having Root,” 149, n. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark’s Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 197.

they ‘put us on the spot’.<sup>72</sup> In Mark’s Gospel there is a repeated pattern in which Jesus is presented as a compassionate healer who attends readily to the diverse needs of many ailing and suppliant individuals. By various means, readers may make connections with these characters who are changed. Elizabeth Malbon rightly considers that these encounters of ‘minor’ characters with Jesus provide ‘narrative punctuation’—points at which it is appropriate for the implied audience to pause and reflect. Malbon’s view is that the author is using the characters to communicate with the audience.<sup>73</sup> They illustrate a number of potential responses to Jesus, in almost all cases providing examples of faith and understanding of a kind that the audience may share. The stories of their healings potentially foster the implied audience’s hope for similar evidences of compassionate ministry and consequent wholeness.

These ‘minor’ characters are often viewed as exemplars and role models.<sup>74</sup> However, Peter Bolt gives a more nuanced account of ‘identification’: he notes that role models and character traits provide a ‘weak’ basis for identification because they maintain ‘distance’ between a reader and a character, whereas a ‘strong’ identification occurs when the readers recognise themselves in a character.<sup>75</sup> He argues convincingly that Mark’s portrayal of the ‘minor’ characters effectively reduces the ‘distance’ between them and the readers. Mark achieves this initially by using the dramatic mode (*mimēsis*) rather than the narrative mode (*diēgēsis*), or showing rather than telling, so that the readers feel like first-hand observers of the action. Second, many scenes are ‘focalised’ through the characters. That is, they narrate their own story as their own point of view is made explicit. Third, Mark

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<sup>72</sup> Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 68.

<sup>73</sup> Malbon, *Company*, 193–4, 225.

<sup>74</sup> E.g., Robert C. Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role,” in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. William Telford (London: SPCK, 1985), 134–57; Williams, *Other Followers*, 87, 203. Williams’ book is a valuable study of the minor characters in Mark’s Gospel; he analyses these characters in terms of their ‘traits’ (60–67, 90).

<sup>75</sup> Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 12–16.



creates sympathy (appeal to *pathos* rather than *ēthos*) through a variety of means that includes naming, positive characteristics, explanation, emotion, inside views and gender.<sup>76</sup>

Mark's suppliant characters represent such a wide variety of people (females, males, Jews, Gentiles, and those of high and low status) that they have a large potential to 'connect' with mixed audiences.<sup>77</sup> In narrative critical terms, there is potential for the audience to identify with each character when they share their 'point of view'.<sup>78</sup> It is notable that although only about ten percent of the Herodian Palestinian population could be classed as unclean, marginalised and expendable (i.e., demoniacs, beggars, swineherds, the physically deformed, etc.) there are 22 references to them in Mark's story, and most of Jesus' healing activity is concentrated on this group.<sup>79</sup> The other 'minor' characters represent the bulk of the population (rural peasants and villagers) and include the disciples, the 'crowd' and the family of Jesus. Jesus himself is to be recognised as a member of this social stratum; his lifestyle (and his non-observance of certain of the purity laws that were difficult for peasants to keep at the best of times) would have been familiar to the ordinary country and village folk.<sup>80</sup>

The audience's 'identification' with the disciples is more complex. Mark portrays them at first positively, and then increasingly negatively. Although they are active participants in Jesus' programme as preachers/healers (6:7-13) and as helpers

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<sup>76</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 16–19.

<sup>77</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 23–25, notes that Mark presents them not as types or exemplars or vehicles of 'traits', but as *anthrōpoi*—human beings from the real world, with whom readers share a culture.

<sup>78</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?: A New Approach to the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1993), Chapter 5, 'Characters'.

<sup>79</sup> Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "The Jesus Tradition: The Gospel Writers' Strategies of Persuasion," in *The Early Christian World, Vol. 1*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 2001), 206.

<sup>80</sup> Rohrbaugh, "Jesus Tradition," 209. Rohrbaugh postulates that Mark uses the rhetorical strategy of 'linguistic convergence': 'By locating his Jesus in the same social space as that occupied by the reader, Mark gains the reader's sympathy' (210). This analysis may well be correct, though it does not take into account the probability that Mark's original audience is not located solely in Palestine.

in the feeding of the crowd (6:30-44),<sup>81</sup> and though they have ‘left all’ (10:28), their understanding of the significance of this programme proves to be inadequate. Malbon considers that the audience is encouraged both to identify with the disciples and to judge them as ‘fallible followers’.<sup>82</sup> Vernon Robbins’ analysis, based on his identification of progressive rhetorical forms in the text, points out that since no one in the story responds fully to the system of thought and action taught and enacted by Jesus, the reader ‘feels a special necessity to respond’. Peter’s denial, the flight of the disciples and the fear of the women at the end of the story put pressure on the audience to ‘respond with greater resolution and sustained commitment than anyone featured in the narrative actually did’.<sup>83</sup>

Paul Danove’s analysis similarly identifies ways in which the text ‘cultivates’ both positive and negative beliefs about the disciples, largely through the rhetoric of repeated words and contexts.<sup>84</sup> This creates, for the readers/hearers who simultaneously identify with and distance themselves from the disciples, a conflict of expectations. Thus, for Danove, Mark’s narrative rhetoric promotes a ‘crisis of discipleship’ for the implied reader:

[This crisis] has its origin in the disciple’s inadequate understanding of God’s actions and attributes, the nature and extent of Jesus’ positive relationship and identification with God, and the implications of these actions and attributes and this relationship for the disciple.<sup>85</sup>

Faced with the failings of the disciples in the narrative at the end of the story, the audience is pressured to consider the quality of their own discipleship of Jesus. Fowler states the rhetorical situation graphically:

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<sup>81</sup> Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006). Henderson maintains (60, 167, 202, 244) that this participation evidences a degree of transformation through empowerment.

<sup>82</sup> Malbon, *Company*, 197. See also her more detailed article, “Fallible Followers”, 41-69 in the same volume.

<sup>83</sup> Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 208–09.

<sup>84</sup> Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterisation*, 90–126.

<sup>85</sup> Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterisation*, 158.



At the level of discourse the burden of discipleship now falls squarely upon the shoulders of the only remaining candidate for discipleship—the reader of the Gospel.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the disciples, there are numerous characters who resist or even reject transformation. Among these (who seek to ‘save their own lives’) are the scribes and Pharisees, the audience at Nazareth (6:6), Judas and the rich man (10:17-31). In the last case the *non*-transformation of the man functions to sharpen the audience’s response: readers identify (i.e., sympathise) with the man’s yearning for eternal life, but then sadly recognise, with the man, that he is bound by the chains of riches. Will they, too, walk away from Jesus? Immediately the readers are challenged with the saying about the camel and the needle (25), and are brought to the conclusion that salvation is unobtainable by human efforts: only the power of God can transform the hearts of humans (27), in this case by enabling them to renounce their possessions, as the disciples have done (28). Concluding with a promise of reward (29-31), the story takes the reader on an emotional journey from hope, through sadness and dismay, to assurance.<sup>87</sup>

### **Response to Jesus as a character**

Jesus, as the central character of the Gospel, is the direct or indirect agent of significant change for the other characters. Bas van Iersel writes that Mark ‘tells the story to make it mean something more than the events narrated ... [he] also wants to convince his readers of the importance Jesus still has for them.’<sup>88</sup> The reader makes connections with Jesus not only as the supreme exemplar of the way of life he himself has taught, but also as the agent of change in the lives of the characters. The reader may then extrapolate to the possibility of Jesus’ becoming the agent of potential changes in the reader’s own understanding and experience.

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<sup>86</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 70.

<sup>87</sup> Berger, *Identity*, 149–52.

<sup>88</sup> Bas van Iersel, *Reading Mark*, trans. W.H. Bisscheroux (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 6.

One of Mark's distinctive emphases is the wonder and amazement that Jesus engenders in the witnesses to his teachings and miracles (e.g., 1:22, 27; 2:12).<sup>89</sup> In the narrative, this kind of reaction is a response to what is perceived as divine intervention; it attests that God has been revealed.<sup>90</sup> The pressure on the reader is to recognise that the story involves the mystery and power of the transcendent God whose presence is also available to the reader, and to share that response of wonder, which may stimulate faith. Such responses of amazement may also indicate that the narrated events have challenged the audience's preconceptions.

In Tolbert's view, ancient literature gives the plot greater prominence and importance than the characters.<sup>91</sup> Whether or not this is true,<sup>92</sup> Mark's Gospel is manifestly the story of Jesus on the journey from his baptism at the Jordan to his ministry in Galilee, and finally to his death in Jerusalem. Here the audience's response to Jesus as a character is tightly bound up with its response to the plot. The audience is likely to be moved by hearing of *what happens* to Jesus. They discern very early in the Gospel (2:6-7) that his deeds and words elicit displeasure on the part of the authorities and subsequently incite conflict that escalates toward a patently unjust crucifixion. Mark thus challenges the audience at various points in the story (e.g., 3:6; 3:22; 6:2, 3) to make their own evaluation of Jesus—whose side are they on? The words of the centurion at the cross provide a fitting model for readers who respond in the way the author expects: 'Truly this man was the Son of God' (15:39).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> On this see Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 196–202.

<sup>90</sup> Dwyer, *Wonder*, 198.

<sup>91</sup> Tolbert, "Character," 349.

<sup>92</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 13, challenges this assertion.

<sup>93</sup> This is true whether or not the centurion's words are taken as a 'full Christian confession of Jesus' divine sonship'. This issue is discussed in Earl S. Johnson, "Mark 15:39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion," *Biblica* 81 (2000): 406–13. Michael F. Bird, "Tearing the Heavens and Shaking the Heavens: Mark's Cosmology in Its Apocalyptic Context," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough (London: T&T



## The significance of the metamorphosis of Jesus

At the centre of the Gospel is a pericope in which the transformation of persons is dazzlingly illustrated (9:2-13). Jesus is ‘metamorphosed’ in the presence of his disciples (καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, 9:2). Although Mark mentions only his dazzling clothes (9:3), the transformation is primarily of Jesus himself (Mt 17:2 adds that ‘his face shone’) and the manifestations of ‘glory’ temporarily unveil his post-resurrection glory.<sup>94</sup> The episode links Jesus with the salvation history of Israel in a way that sets him at the centre of it, with divine affirmation.

The event is an observed transformation whose primary significance, for the disciples and for Mark, is undoubtedly christological in that it displays the authority and divinity of Jesus; as such, the story plays a part in Mark’s ‘rhetoric of perception’.<sup>95</sup> However, the story can be seen to have anthropological overtones, because, while Jesus is ‘glorified’ as Son of God, he is also *anthrōpos*. This raises the possibility of the glorification of his fellow *anthrōpoi*. The concept of individual, bodily resurrection is certainly in evidence in the time of Jesus and the disciples.<sup>96</sup> Paul expresses this in terms of ‘glory that will be revealed in us’ (Rom 8:18; cf. 2 Cor 4:17-18). Although the mysteries of incarnation and participation in Christ are

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Clark, 2008), 49–55, makes a persuasive case for the expression of divinity based on the *inclusio* of 1:9-11 (Jesus’ baptism, with σχίζω and πνεῦμα) and 15:37-39 (his death, interpreted as ‘baptism’ in 10:37-39, with σχίζω and ἐκπνέω).

<sup>94</sup> Mark refers to Jesus’ eschatological glory in 8:38, 10:37 and 13:26. See further Stephen C. Barton, “The Transfiguration of Christ according to Mark and Matthew: Christology and Anthropology,” in *Auferstehung – Resurrection*, ed. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 231–46. Jesus’ words in 9:9b explicitly link his metamorphosis with his resurrection.

<sup>95</sup> See below, p. 162. The three disciples see the glorious transformation with physical eyes. The transfigured Jesus demands attention: as the divine voice says ‘Listen, hear’, the visible glory says ‘Look, see’. Jesus is illumined, not from without, but from within. In the light of 7:1-21, Jesus can be perceived here as the source of goodness, purity, righteousness, etc.

<sup>96</sup> Andrew Chester, “Resurrection and Transformation,” in *Auferstehung – Resurrection*, ed. Friedrich Avemarie and Hermann Lichtenberger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 47–77. Chester examines the influence of Ezek 34-37, Isa 26:19, 25:8, Hos 6:1-3 and 13:14; in these texts the use of resurrection imagery is primarily metaphorical. Dan 12:1-3, however, introduces ‘a new dimension into the understanding of the human condition’ with its completely transformed perspective on death and life (63). Expectations of resurrection are evident in Mk 6:14-16 and 12:25-26. See also the evidence amassed by N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 129–200.

presumably not available to the disciples, these concepts are within the theological framework of Mark and at least some of his readers, if they are familiar with texts such as Romans 8:17 ('glorified with Him') and Philippians 3:21 (Christ 'will transform the body of our humble state into conformity [σύμμορφον] with the body of His glory').

If the Gospel is about personal and social transformation, the transfiguration story throws the spotlight on Jesus as the focus and agent of human transformation, and implies that the kind of transformation promoted in the Gospel is only possible through the mediation of the resurrected and glorified Jesus.<sup>97</sup>

To summarise: I have argued that Mark's 'rhetoric of demonstration' provides his audience with many opportunities to observe changes in a wide variety of characters in the Gospel (especially the minor characters and the disciples) and to identify with those characters through sympathetic alignment. The transformations observed by the audience as the narrative progresses can function rhetorically to stimulate processes of response in the audience that may well lead to their own transformation.

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<sup>97</sup> Recent scholars have succinctly summarised the anthropological significance of Jesus' metamorphosis. Barton, "Transfiguration," 231: 'The transfiguration offers decisive illumination on the question of who Christ is and therefore what it means to be truly human.' M.C. Steenberg, "Two-Natured Man: An Anthropology of Transfiguration," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (2005): 419: 'In the transfiguration we witness not only the realized eschatology of Christ's glorified state, but also the full vision of humanity in its own perfection.' Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), 190: 'As the one who bears the heavenly image, the resurrected Christ provides the only adequate definition of humanity, the fulfilment of a person's inherent potential for transcendence.'



## 2.3 The rhetoric of instruction: transformations urged

Alongside the narratives, and contained within them, are the reported words of Jesus, many occurring in didactic passages, which often carry the *expectation* of change. Jesus is constantly urging his hearers to change: he challenges their self-understanding, their religious beliefs, their allegiances and their traditional definitions of ritual purity. He urges them to repent, to think God's thoughts, to 'see,' to 'understand.' He places before his audience the necessity and the possibility of personal and social transformation. He calls for perceptual, behavioural and relational changes that amount to a radical shift of worldview occasioned by his drastically modified conception of the kingdom of God.<sup>98</sup> His approach (as Richard Burridge has noted) is 'more like that of a prophet seeking a response than an ethical teacher wanting to impart moral maxims'.<sup>99</sup> In contrast to the implied rhetoric of the demonstrated changes discussed in the previous section, the rhetoric of these urged changes is more explicit. I will examine now some of the means by which this rhetoric operates.

### The 'direct address' of Jesus to the audience

From one point of view it is artificial to distinguish too sharply between narrative and didactic passages in the Gospel. Mark has evidently crafted the whole, and one can never be sure to what extent he has modified his traditional sources. His rhetorical purpose and the various means he uses to move the reader are pervasive throughout both the story-telling and the teaching. Yet it has been noted that the

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<sup>98</sup> John Riches and Alan Millar, "Conceptual Change in the Synoptic Tradition," in *Alternative Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. A.E. Harvey (London: SPCK, 1985), 37–60.

<sup>99</sup> Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 166.

words of Jesus offer a ‘fully authoritative voice’<sup>100</sup> that has a more direct appeal to the reader/hearer of the Gospel than the subtler implications of Mark’s narrative passages.

Although the didactic material is aimed at characters *in* the story, the readers ‘infer a direct analogy’ to themselves and perceive that they, too, are being addressed as they listen in to the story.<sup>101</sup> Several characteristics of the style of Jesus’ words carry the power of what scholars have termed ‘direct address’<sup>102</sup> or ‘direct engagement’.<sup>103</sup> Some more detailed aspects of direct address will be treated below (pp. 94-96) in relation to the oral ‘performance’ of the text. It will suffice here to note a few of the more obvious types: inclusive forms, exhortative imperatives and rhetorical questions.

### 1. *Inclusive forms*

Mark often narrates the actions and responses of ‘the whole crowd’ (e.g., 1:5, 32; 2:12; 5:20; 2:13; 4:1; 6:42; 9:15; 11:18; 14:23) thereby providing a model for the responses of his audience.<sup>104</sup> Much more overtly, however, Jesus sometimes explicitly addresses all readers through the use of *πάς* (e.g., 7:14; 9:49; 13:37). Alternatively, the indefinite expressions ‘anyone’ (*τις*), ‘whoever’ (*ὅς ἐάν*) and ‘no one’ (*οὐδείς*) are often used (e.g., 4:23; 8:34, 35, 38; 9:35, 37, 39, 41, 42; 10:11, 15, 29, 43, 44).

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<sup>100</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 73; see also John A. Darr, “‘Watch How You Listen’ (Luke 8:18): Jesus and the Rhetoric of Perception in Luke-Acts,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 104.

<sup>101</sup> Darr, “Watch,” 88.

<sup>102</sup> David F. Smith, “Can We Hear?” 175–83.

<sup>103</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, “Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew’s Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 19–35.

<sup>104</sup> In the final scenes, however, this technique is reversed, and the audience instinctively distances itself from the multitude (*πάντες*) who flee from Jesus and condemn him (14:50, 64).



An example of this inclusion of the reader occurs in 3:34-35, in which Jesus redefines the whole group of disciples. The followers of Jesus (ὄχλος here, but they are inside the house, sitting around Jesus) are called ‘my mother and my brothers’, if they are ‘those who do the will of God.’ The followers have become ‘family’—fictive kin. The rhetorical implication of this is that the audience is immediately able to perceive themselves (‘whoever’) as related in the same way as the disciples to Jesus. If they, too, are seeking to do the will of God, they are included in the story, and they, too, are Jesus’ family.

## 2. *Exhortative imperatives*

‘Watch!’ ‘Listen!’ ‘Look!’ and ‘See!’ are prominent features of Mark’s style. Jesus uses the imperatives βλέπετε (4:24; 8:15; 13:5, 9, 23, 33), ὁρᾶτε (8:15), ἰδοὺ (4:3; 10:33; 14:41, 42), ἀκούετε (4:3; 7:14; 9:7; 12:29), σύνετε (7:14), ἀγρυπνεῖτε (13:33), προσεύχεσθε (14:38) and γρηγορεῖτε (13:35, 37; 14:34, 38) to exhort his listeners (within the story and without) to beware the leaven of the Pharisees, to take care what they listen to (especially his parables and his passion predictions), to take note of his betrayal, and to watch and pray (to be alert for signs of the end and of his coming). In these passages Jesus speaks with an authoritative voice that directly engages the readers, telling them when, where or how to watch, listen and look.<sup>105</sup> An added voice of authority is the voice from heaven in 9:7, telling the audience to listen to Jesus.

## 3. *Rhetorical questions*

Some questions seem designed to confront the audience outside the story as strongly as those inside it. Rhetorical questions force the audience to supply their own

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<sup>105</sup> For an engaging treatment of this theme in Luke’s Gospel, see Darr, “Watch,” 87–88.

answers. An example is Jesus' unanswered question in 12:37, regarding the Messiah as Son of David: 'How is he his son?' A nest of these challenging questions is addressed to the disciples in Mark 8:

- 'Do you not yet see or understand?' (8:17)
- 'Do you have a hardened heart?' (8:17)
- 'Having eyes, do you not see?' (8:18)
- 'Do you not remember?' (8:18)
- 'Who do people say that I am?' (8:27)
- 'What does it profit to gain the whole world and forfeit one's life?' (8:36)
- 'What shall one give in exchange for one's life?' (8:37)

In the context of the story, the questions in 8:17-18 are addressed to the disciples. By this stage they have shown themselves to be afraid and uncomprehending (6:49-52; 7:17, 18). Members of the audience, 'overhearing' these questions, may well compare their attitudes with those of the disciples, either in identification or distance, and apply the questions to themselves, asking, 'How would *I* answer?'<sup>106</sup>

### **Jesus as an agent of change**

Before moving to a consideration of the specific content of Jesus' urgings, it will be helpful to take an overview of the kinds of transformation that Jesus is generating in Mark's Gospel. The emergent interdisciplinary field of futures studies provides some useful heuristic tools, concerned as it is with the taxonomy of change and processes of social transformation.<sup>107</sup> Its interests lie particularly in the study of images of the future, how they are created and spread, how they shape human behavior, and how they help shape the future itself.<sup>108</sup> Sohail Inayatullah, a leader in this field, deals

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<sup>106</sup> For a detailed treatment of the rhetorical implications of questions addressed to Jesus in Mark's Gospel, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "Questions, Chreai and Challenges to Honor: The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark's Gospel," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 657-81.

<sup>107</sup> For an introduction to the major concerns of futures studies, see the following online material: [http://www.csudh.edu/global\\_options/IntroFS.HTML#Intro/OverviewFS](http://www.csudh.edu/global_options/IntroFS.HTML#Intro/OverviewFS); *The Journal of Futures Studies*, <http://www.jfs.tku.edu.tw/index.html> (both accessed 6.11.08).

<sup>108</sup> Wendell Bell, "The Future of Human Society," in *Future Matters Conference Precipis* (2006), <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/futures/conference/abstracts/bell.pdf>, accessed 20.4.07.



with processes of change within organisations.<sup>109</sup> He identifies some important elements of strategy that facilitate a process of intentional change. Tasks confronting agents of change, who have already developed a new vision of an ‘alternative future’, include identifying and breaking up the rigidity of old structures so that room is made for a new paradigm. This also involves a redefinition of social groupings, with their various allegiances and structures. ‘Dominant myths’ (the narratives that give collective meaning to the organisation) on which past practices have been founded must be identified, and misleading ideas uncovered. In their place, new ‘meme clusters’ must be introduced. Memes, as Inayatullah explains, are ‘ideas that self-replicate because they meet some foundational need of the organisation. They have the capacity to change institutions and society in the long run.’<sup>110</sup> New memes equip people, individually and collectively, to make new meanings and initiate new actions—to ‘live a different story’. Then there must be a process of education, in association with the modelling of the projected change.

This is a useful model with which to compare the strategy of Jesus narrated in Mark’s Gospel. His teaching works towards breaking up the rigidity of old structures; he deconstructs old paradigms and makes room for the construction of a new paradigm.<sup>111</sup> Negatively, Jesus explicitly exposes the expansionist view of purity and holiness promoted by the Pharisees (see, e.g., 8:15). In addition, by not allowing the Gerasene demoniac to follow him as a disciple (5:18-20), Jesus implicitly deconstructs (and redefines) one aspect of the ubiquitous patron-client

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<sup>109</sup> Sohail Inayatullah, “From Organizational to Institutional Change,” *On the Horizon* 13, no. 1 (March 2005): 46–53, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/Insight/html/Output/Published/EmeraldFullTextArticle/Articles/2740130107.html> (accessed 15.10.05).

<sup>110</sup> Inayatullah, “From Organizational to Institutional Change”.

<sup>111</sup> Wahlen calls this a ‘replacement motif’; see Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 70, 81. See also Riches and Millar, “Conceptual Change”: ‘the primary thrust of Jesus’ teaching [was] the way in which he changed traditional concepts’ (43).

relationship in which a person is bound to another of higher status on account of having received a favour.<sup>112</sup>

Positively, Jesus provides ‘new wine’ for ‘new wineskins’ (2:21, 22). He redefines social groupings and allegiances, relativising natural family ties and establishing the brotherhood of disciples (e.g., 3:31-35).<sup>113</sup> He introduces a new ‘meme cluster’ comprising fresh and surprising interpretations of concepts such as the kingdom of God, repentance, faith and discipleship. In so doing, he fosters a new vision for an alternative future in which ‘God’s thoughts’ take precedence over ‘human thoughts’ (8:33). In all this, Jesus demonstrates in his own manner of life the implications of the new vision; he models the ‘performance’ of his own teaching, and also provides opportunities for his disciples to put it into practice (6:7-13).

### **A changed view of purity**

The specific content of Jesus’ urgings is manifold; there are far too many to treat in detail in the present work. A brief look at one passage, however, will be fruitful. The teaching of Jesus in 7:14-23 introduces and promotes a changed understanding (σύνετε is used in 7:14, ἀσύνετοί and νοεῖτε in 7:18). The urgency of this teaching is indicated by direct address in the form of the introductory imperatives: ‘Listen to me, all of you, and understand’(7:14). Jesus contrasts the traditional view of the Jewish leaders (external ritual observances determine one’s cleanliness) with a new view (moral or immoral behaviour, issuing from the heart, determines purity or pollution). This contrast highlights a radical revisioning of what constitutes ‘defilement’ and ‘purity’.

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<sup>112</sup> Anne Dawson, *Freedom as Liberating Power: A Socio-Political Reading of the ἐξουσία Texts in the Gospel of Mark* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 2000), 161–62. See also below, p. 135.

<sup>113</sup> Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994).



This changed understanding has already been demonstrated in Jesus' action (eating with unwashed hands) in which the disciples have participated, although apparently without understanding the reason (7:2, 5). Without expressly answering the question put to him, Jesus goes to the principle behind it and spells out for his audience the priority of the heart over ritual. This concept provides a common focus for the whole section 7:1-23. The first part of this section (1-13) deals with a controversy with the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem. Jesus employs a series of antitheses:

their lips ..	their heart (6)
tradition of men ..	commandment of God (8)
your tradition ..	commandment of God (9)
you say (11) ..	Moses said (10)
your tradition ..	word of God (13)

These antitheses set the externals of ritual performance against the interiority of open-hearted faithfulness to God. Jesus condemns the former, which enable the neglect of parents in the name of *korban*, and commends the latter. The antithesis is carried over into the second half of the section (7:14-23, which is private instruction for the disciples and for the audience). Things outside a person, or those which enter a person—it is clear that Jesus is here referring mainly to foods—are contrasted with the behaviours and attitudes that issue from within a person, that is, from the heart.<sup>114</sup> Of course, this perception was not entirely new, for the Hebrew scriptures required purity of heart and the participation of the whole heart in fulfilling the commandments,<sup>115</sup> and at Qumran it was recognised that stubbornness of heart

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<sup>114</sup> For an account of the formal rhetoric of 7:1-23 see Miriam Dean-Otting and Vernon K. Robbins, "Biblical Sources for Pronouncement Stories in the Gospels," *Semeia* 64 (1993): 111–15 and Gregory Salyer, "Rhetoric, Purity and Play: Aspects of Mark 7:1–23," *Semeia* 64 (1993): 139–69. Salyer helpfully examines the rhetoric of the 'purity' discourse in terms of epideictic elaboration of a chreia. The rhetoric works by decentring the tradition of the elders and recognising a new centre, the human heart.

<sup>115</sup> See Dt 4:29; 1 Chron 28:9; Ps 24:4; Prov 22:11; Isa 29:13 and many others. Christian Stettler, "Purity of Heart in Jesus' Teaching: Mark 7:14–23 Par. as an Expression of Jesus' *Basileia* Ethics," *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 55 (2004): 489, gives a more complete list.

neutralised the efficacy of ritual performance (e.g., 1QS 3:4-12; 5:13-14).<sup>116</sup> However, Jesus here goes further than these writings, and, on the basis of his own authority, presents a new teaching that is truly revolutionary<sup>117</sup>—an element of the ‘new wine’ (2:22) that characterises Jesus’ radical proclamation of the kingdom of God.<sup>118</sup>

In the light of the dawning of the eschatological kingdom, Jesus urges a new understanding, a relativisation of tradition regarding ritual purity, in favour of the priority of the pure heart.<sup>119</sup> Jesus does not abrogate purity requirements, but he redraws the boundary between holiness and unholiness in terms of moral behaviour rather than external cleanliness.<sup>120</sup> This coheres with Jesus’ actions and words in numerous other episodes. He counters the purity rules on numerous occasions by venturing into ‘unclean’ territory (5:1-20; 7:24-30), eating with ‘unclean’ people (2:16; 8:1-10) touching ‘unclean’ people (1:40-45; 5:35-43) and healing on the Sabbath (1:29-31; 3:1-6). His emphasis on the priority of the heart relativises the wholeness of one’s body, for the loss of eyes, hands and feet does not prevent access to the kingdom of God (9:42-49). The importance of the ‘unhardened heart’ emerges in several sayings (3:5; 8:17; 10:5) and the priority of love of God with the ‘whole heart’ is ‘much more’ than ritual sacrifices (12:30, 33).

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<sup>116</sup> Alex R.G. Deasley, *The Shape of Qumran Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 189–97.

<sup>117</sup> R.T. France, *Divine Government: God’s Kingship in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SPCK, 1990), 48–63.

<sup>118</sup> Stettler’s “Purity of Heart” examines this passage as ‘an expression of Jesus’ *basileia* ethics’.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Kazen appropriately summarises: [Jesus’ attitude to bodily impurity] ‘should be seen within the context of a power struggle, in which the force of bodily impurity was overruled by the power of the kingdom in a similar way to unclean spirits being overcome by exorcism’. Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2002), 339.

<sup>120</sup> David Rhoads, “Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries,” in *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies (2nd Edition)*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 171. Rhoads’s approach is a cultural anthropological one that insightfully analyses this teaching as a redrawing of cosmological, social and bodily boundaries.



It is this new understanding that is transformative, because it requires a transformed relationship to the traditional system of ritual purity. The changes here urged by Jesus will be demonstrated by those who follow him. One implication is explicit in Mark's comment that Jesus thus 'declared all foods clean' (7:19). Disciples (including those in the audience) will now be expected to place a lower priority (or, indeed, no value at all) on ritual washings and dietary restrictions, and to recognise their own hearts as the locus that determines one's 'cleanliness' before God and one's ethical behaviour. By analogy and extension, disciples (including those in the audience) will be expected also to disregard, as Jesus has done, the social boundaries that have separated Jews from Gentiles; there is now no need to avoid contact with those previously regarded as 'unclean' because of race, status or physical condition. This new way of looking at the world lays the foundation for a transformed way of living.

Note that Mark's Jesus does not define purity here, but rather describes it by the absence of certain evil behaviours and attitudes;<sup>121</sup> this is an instance of the Gospel's 'opacity', to which I will refer in the following section.

## **2.4 The rhetoric of indirection**

Robert M. Fowler, a pioneer in the field of Mark's narrative rhetoric, illuminates helpfully, though not exhaustively, various literary techniques (effectively, strategies of persuasion) used by the writer of Mark's Gospel. Among these, and in contrast to strategies that (more or less) direct the audience how to respond, are what Fowler

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<sup>121</sup> Salyer, "Rhetoric," 166.

calls ‘strategies of indirection’.<sup>122</sup> These include irony, metaphor, paradox, ambiguity and opacity. I will examine each of these briefly and show how their use may be regarded as promoting the transformation of the audience.

While this ‘strategy of indirection’ is characteristically Markan (Matthew and Luke clearly react against it and provide specificity in many places where Mark is vague), it is congruent with much ancient literature in its ‘high-context’ nature. That is, as Bruce Malina points out, such texts present material in sketchy and impressionistic terms, leaving much to the reader’s imagination; because the writer and the original readers share many contextual assumptions, it is not necessary to spell out everything.<sup>123</sup>

## Irony

Irony involves a certain incongruity between what is said or done (innocently on the part of the characters) and the unspoken/unwritten significance of those words or actions in the perception of a sympathetic audience. Because of what the author and the audience already know, words or situations at the ‘story’ level may have different connotations at the ‘discourse’ level, provoking the reader ‘to see beneath the surface of the text to deeper significances’.<sup>124</sup>

There is much irony in Mark’s Gospel. Some of it is verbal irony, where the significance hinges on the use of particular words. The classic instance is the mockery of the soldiers in 15:18, ‘Hail, King of the Jews’. Other examples of irony are of the situational or dramatic kind, where the significance hinges on the interpretation of actions or events. Demons speak the truth about Jesus, while his family and the religious leaders say he is insane or has an ‘unclean spirit’! Members

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<sup>122</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 155.

<sup>123</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The Social World of Jesus and the Gospels* (London: Routledge, 1996), 24–5.

<sup>124</sup> Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, 1.



of the audience, armed with the interpretive key (Jesus is the Son of God) disclosed at the outset of the Gospel, have more insight than the characters who fail to recognise who Jesus is.

Irony plays a large part in the rhetorical effect of Peter's responses. Peter misses the point in several scenes, rejecting the first passion prediction (8:32) and being unable to make a sensible comment on the transfiguration appearances (9:5). But Mark and the audience know that Jesus' passion predictions were fulfilled, and that his crucifixion was an integral component of messiahship. They also know that the glory of Jesus and the heroes (Moses and Elijah) cannot be trivialised in material dwellings.<sup>125</sup>

Irony functions rhetorically in several ways. It provokes a perceptive reader to a deeper, more mature understanding. It forces the reader to a decision as to which point of view should be taken—whether to go along with the words or actions of the character or to stand with those who see an incongruity in those words or actions. Irony thus also creates a sense of community amongst those who recognise the 'subtext' of the story.<sup>126</sup>

The ultimate function of irony in the Gospel is realised at its abrupt and inconclusive end. Its hearers are likely to know more of how the story ends than do the silent, fearful women at the empty tomb; this knowledge is likely to motivate them to break the silence and proclaim the 'good news'. Camery-Hoggatt writes,

The ironies in Mark have left the reader with a deep sense that more is going on than meets the eye—that this story, including its catastrophe, is meaningful in a dimension not readily available on the surface. The reader is forced back into the book again. The ironies of the

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<sup>125</sup> See Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, for insightful treatments of these and other instances of irony in Mark. Also Glyndle M. Feagin Jr., *Irony and the Kingdom in Mark: A Literary-Critical Study* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997); Stephen H. Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 192–233.

<sup>126</sup> Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 73–74.

story-line will raise a host of significances which will continue to haunt the reader long after the story has been drawn to a close.<sup>127</sup>

It is part of Mark's purpose, I would argue, that the haunting significances in his story of Jesus will promote lasting changes in the attitudes and commitments of its audience. I will draw these out in Chapter 5.

## Metaphor

Mark uses many metaphors, the vast majority of which appear in Jesus' reported words. These include the physician metaphor (2:17, partially interpreted in the text), the coupled metaphor of the patch and the wineskins (2:21-22, uninterpreted), the metaphor of growth (Mark 4) and the extended metaphor of blindness and deafness, which I will discuss in some detail in section 2.5 below.<sup>128</sup> Parables, of which there are a number in the Gospel, can be viewed as extended metaphorical discourses.

The use of a metaphor challenges the audience to make meaning. The task is to explore the possibilities and implications of the image and to discover a coherent understanding. Many metaphors are 'riddlelike, unclear as to scope, and often unclear as to referent'.<sup>129</sup> This gives the audience considerable mental work to do. Even where a metaphor is interpreted, as in the physician metaphor, in which the concepts of health and sickness are transferred to the concepts of righteousness and sin, many questions and applications remain to be clarified. Not only is the audience pressured to search for clarification in the rest of the story they are hearing or reading, but the presence of the metaphor is also an invitation to consider its implications for their own lives. Hearers may appropriately ask, for example, 'Am I

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<sup>127</sup> Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, 177.

<sup>128</sup> See p. 78. Fowler (Fowler, *Reader*, 179) gives a more complete list of metaphors in the Gospel, but strangely does not include the metaphor of blindness and deafness.

<sup>129</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 179.



sick, needing a physician?’ (2:17) or ‘Do I have a hard heart?’ (8:17) or ‘Am I blind or deaf, needing my eyes or ears opened?’

## Paradox

The common definition of ‘paradox’ as ‘an apparently self-contradictory statement’ is a modern one. Its original meaning, following its etymological derivation (παράδοξα) is ‘a statement contrary to expectation or to commonly accepted opinion, and therefore incredible’.<sup>130</sup> In Mark’s Gospel there are examples of both flavours, primarily from the lips of Jesus. Paradoxical in the self-contradictory sense is Jesus’ statement, ‘Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it’ (8:35). Similarly, the father of the demon-possessed boy cries, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ (9:24). Sayings of this type present the audience with incongruities and the consequent need for interpretations that make sense of them. In addition to these verbal paradoxes, there are instances of what Fowler calls ‘extended or dramatic paradox’ in which the audience is challenged ‘to find a way between polar opposites’.<sup>131</sup>

For example, although Jesus is clearly the Messiah, he is crucified. The disciples struggle with this incongruity from the first passion prediction (8:32) through to the very end of the Gospel, and it presents just as much challenge to the audience. Another example is the recurring incongruity that has often been dubbed ‘the Messianic Secret’. At the story level, there is a tension between proclamation and hiddenness, and the audience must work out for themselves what is appropriate for their own response.

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<sup>130</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). Luke 5:26 uses the word: Εἶδομεν παράδοξα σήμερον—‘We have seen incredible things today!’

<sup>131</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 191. For Fowler’s treatment of paradox in the Gospel see 184-194.

Paradoxical in the more ancient sense are the statements of Jesus that go against popular opinion. Narry Santos's study of paradox in Mark's Gospel identifies a recurring 'paradox of authority and servanthood'. The authority of Jesus is strongly established in the first half of the Gospel,<sup>132</sup> but Jesus increasingly sets out a counter-cultural ideal of servanthood as the centrepiece of his ethics. Mark 10:42-45 is the focal point:

'You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'

Santos believes that Mark has used this paradox (i.e., a radical departure from accepted opinion and practice) as a rhetorical device to jolt and challenge his audience to consider that servanthood may be compatible with authority.<sup>133</sup>

## Ambiguity

The possibility of more than one meaning in a text forces the reader to wrestle with the text in order to attain coherence. John Goldingay reflects on the role of ambiguity and openness in stories:

An audience-oriented approach to interpretation presupposes that ambiguity may be inherent in a story and asks what its openesses do to an audience, or what it does with them, aware that it is precisely in its ambiguity at such points that the story can challenge an audience regarding its own attitude. We have to 'fill in the blanks' in the story.<sup>134</sup>

Many of Jesus' words can be taken in several ways; their ambiguity provokes response in the hearers. Fowler highlights the striking example of the centurion's 'confession' in 15:39. Given the absence of any articles in the phrase *υἱὸς θεοῦ*, is

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<sup>132</sup> An engaging study of Jesus' authority in Mark's Gospel is Richard J. Dillon, "'As One Having Authority' (Mark 1:22): The Controversial Distinction of Jesus' Teaching," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 92-113.

<sup>133</sup> Narry F. Santos, *Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

<sup>134</sup> Goldingay, "How Far?" 6.



Jesus *the* Son of God or not? At the story level the words are ambiguous, but Mark's strong emphasis on 'Son of God' in other places (1:11; 3:11; 9:7; 12:6; 14:61) suggests that Mark (operating at the discourse level) is giving his readers an opportunity to interpret the centurion's words in line with their reading of the rest of the Gospel.<sup>135</sup> The parables are obvious examples of the possibility of openness in interpretation.<sup>136</sup>

## Opacity

Douglas Geyer observes that our attention is often most fully engaged by things that make no sense to us.<sup>137</sup> In contrast to ambiguity, in which a variety of possible meanings is available, the term 'opacity' refers to a characteristic of texts for which no meaning is obvious to the reader. The text is non-transparent, obscure: we cannot see what we would like to see in it. Fowler mentions several places in Mark's story which exclude the reader from full understanding.<sup>138</sup> The mystery of the naked young man (14:51-52) is a famous case in point. Another is Jesus' private explanations to his disciples (4:34); the reader, not being privy to these, experiences distance from the characters. At the inconclusive end of the Gospel, the 'veil of opacity' excludes both characters and readers from a view of the risen Jesus. There is also a relentless exclusion from hearing Jesus' prayers until 14:36, when suddenly the situation changes and the audience alone hears the prayer while the disciples are asleep. For the disciples, this occasion is the last in a long series of episodes in

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<sup>135</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 204–08. See also p. 60, n. 93 above.

<sup>136</sup> See, e.g., Dan O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

<sup>137</sup> Douglas W. Geyer, *Fear, Anomaly and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 272. Geyer (66) suggests that Mark's intention is to create a sort of 'systematic uncertainty'. However, as Stephen I. Wright rightly suggests in his review of Geyer's book (*Biblical Interpretation* 13, [2005]: 206-208), mystery and fearfulness are not really the dominant notes of the Gospel, but are balanced by revelation and reassurance.

<sup>138</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 214–16.

which *they* have been in the dark, experiencing the opacity of the non-seeing eye, the non-hearing ear and the hardened heart, on which I will reflect below.

### **The rhetorical function of indirection**

What might be the impact on the reader of experiencing Mark's varieties of 'fuzzy' communication? P.J. Sankey, following Fowler's lead,<sup>139</sup> writes that Mark's strategy of indirection works 'primarily to affect the reader rather than to convey information'. The gaps 'perform the role of a midwife in bringing to birth the reader's own transformation. Mark's text does not just narrate. It engages not just our attention but our selves.'<sup>140</sup> Whether the readers/hearers are humbled or puzzled or frustrated by the lack of clarity in the story or by their lack of understanding of it, they will be stimulated to engage further in a search for meaning. The 'bottom line' is that attentive, active hearers of Mark's Gospel are likely to be changed by the experience.

## **2.5 The rhetoric of metaphor: blindness and deafness**

### **The motif of seeing, hearing, blindness and deafness**

The metaphorical use of the language of seeing and hearing is crucial to Mark's enterprise, exerting considerable rhetorical pressure. The text employs a variety of words denoting degrees of vision, audition and perception, and in many contexts these are used figuratively. The motif of blindness and deafness appears at several points in the Gospel. There are two stories of blind men receiving sight (8:22-26;

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<sup>139</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 223.

<sup>140</sup> Sankey, "Promise," 17.



10:46-52), two stories of deaf people hearing (7:32-37; 9:14-29), parables about hearing (4:1-26) and two important references (4:12; 8:18) to prophetic passages concerning blindness and deafness. I will examine some of these in more detail below. Added to these intentional elements of the motif are many other instances of seeing/hearing language in the reported words of Jesus as well as in the narration, and some of these may well carry metaphorical significance.<sup>141</sup>

### **Blindness and deafness as metaphor**

The importance of this motif as a significant aspect of Mark's rhetoric derives from its clear use as an extended metaphor, or cluster of metaphors. In accordance with usage common in Hebrew and Greco-Roman literature, seeing and hearing figuratively signify perception and understanding, while conversely blindness and deafness signify lack of understanding. In many genres of Greco-Roman literature blindness is often a metaphor for ignorance and immorality. Plato, for example, uses it often: to be blind (τυφλῶς ἔχειν) and to be ignorant (ἀγνοεῖν) can be taken as synonymous.<sup>142</sup> The figure of eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear is used by the major Hebrew prophets (e.g., Isa 6:9-10; 42:18-20; 43:8; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2-

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<sup>141</sup> The language of vision includes references to eyes (ὀφθαλμός, ὄμμα) ten times, and blindness (τυφλός) five times. Βλέπω and cognates are used 31 times, while θεωρέω is used five times (3:11; 5:15, 38; 15:40; 16:4) and παρατηρέω once (3:2). Forms of ὁράω are used 62 times; this includes 16 uses of ἰδοὺ and ἴδε. I include γρηγορέω as a 'seeing' word, used six times (13:34, 35, 37; 14:34, 37, 38). The greatest concentration of 'seeing' words is found in the adjacent pericopae 8:14-21 and 8:22-26: τυφλός twice, ὀφθαλμός twice, ὄμμα once, forms of βλέπω seven times and ὁράω twice. The language of hearing includes references to ears (οὖς) six times, and deafness (κωφός) three times. Forms of ἀκούω are used 44 times.

<sup>142</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 479b. Plato, for whom the good, the beautiful and the true are associated strongly with light (e.g. in the well-known 'cave simile' in *Rep.* VII, 514-517) is particularly given to the metaphor. For more examples, see Eleftheria A. Bernidaki-Aldous, *Blindness in a Culture of Light: Especially the Case Of Oedipus at Colonus of Sophocles* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 49-50.

3)<sup>143</sup> and is present in the Qumran literature;<sup>144</sup> in these contexts blindness is clearly a metaphor for foolishness, rebellion and lack of understanding. The figure is used in the other Gospels (e.g., Matthew 23:16-26; John 9:35-41) as well as in the epistles (e.g., Romans 2:19; 2 Cor 4:3-6; 2 Peter 4:3-6) and in Revelation 3:17.<sup>145</sup>

There is already present, throughout Mark's Gospel, a motif of understanding and nonunderstanding.<sup>146</sup> Characters, by their words and reactions, very often imply understanding or lack of it. This motif of understanding and nonunderstanding overlaps with the motif of seeing and hearing.<sup>147</sup> The overlap is especially evident in Jesus' parable discourse (Mark 4) where in 4:12 Mark employs the metaphor already present in his quotation of Isaiah 6:9. This presents the possibility of looking (βλέπω) but not truly perceiving (ὁράω), hearing (ἀκούω) but not understanding (συνίημι).<sup>148</sup> The goal of a correct understanding of the parable discourse is reinforced twice by the hearing metaphor in the saying, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' (4:9, 23) and in the narrator's comment, 'With many such parables he was speaking the word to them *as they were able to hear it*' (4:33). The latter comment

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<sup>143</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the motif in Isaiah 6, see Geoffrey D. Robinson, "The Motif of Deafness and Blindness in Isaiah 6:9–10: A Contextual, Literary and Theological Analysis," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 167–86. On the motif in Isaiah 40–55 (and its significance in Mark) see Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 239–52.

<sup>144</sup> 'And now, sons, listen to me and I shall open your eyes so that you can see and understand the deeds of God' (CD 2:14). Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 553.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Susan R. Garrett, "'Lest the light in you be darkness': Luke 11:33–36 and the Question of Commitment," *JBL* 110 (1991): 93–105. A recent valuable study is Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>146</sup> Tracking of the verbs denoting knowledge reveals that forms of οἶδα occur 11 times, γινώσκω three times, συνίημι four times, ἐπίσταμαι once, νοέω twice and ἀγνοέω once. In addition, the non-verbal forms ἀσύνετος, βουνεχῶς and σύνεσις occur once each.

<sup>147</sup> The metaphor of 'leaven' in 8:15 may also signify lack of understanding; see Norman R. Petersen, "The Composition of Mark 4:1–8:26," *HTR* 73 (1980): 211; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 252; its association with the 'evil inclination' (Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 507, 510) suggests corruption of the heart and mind.

<sup>148</sup> For a more detailed account of the verbs of perception in 4:12 see Marcus, *Mystery*, 104–05.



subtly indicates the beginning of an awareness that the disciples themselves have a limited ability to understand Jesus' message and purpose.

The overlap is also evident in 8:17-18. After the second feeding miracle, Jesus puts to the disciples the pointed questions, 'Do you not yet perceive (νοέω) or understand (συνίημι)? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?' This alludes to the previous use of the metaphor, but takes the form of Jeremiah 5:21 and Ezekiel 12:2. It is clear that both 'to hear' and 'to see' in these contexts mean 'to understand'. Still later, authentic perception is denoted by the seeing metaphor (ἰδὼν) used twice in 12:28-34, where both the scripture-quoting scribe and Jesus correctly perceive the wisdom of others' answers (12:28, 34). And those who call on Jesus to 'come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe' (15:32) reveal ironically (for they are 'blind') that true 'sight' is faith.

While the metaphor is clearly inherent in the tradition that Mark has received, it is equally clear that Mark has utilised it as a rhetorical tool, shaping the traditional material. He consistently paints the disciples as blind, deaf and uncomprehending. Mark distinctively uses the figure of the 'hardened heart' in intimate connection with the extended metaphor of blindness and deafness.<sup>149</sup> It appears four times in the Gospel, and two of these occurrences refer to the disciples. Mark's commentary in 6:52 explains that the disciples had not understood about the loaves; rather, their hearts were hardened,<sup>150</sup> and Jesus' chastening speech to the disciples in 8:17-18 arranges verbs of negative perception and incomprehension around the central concept of the hardened heart:

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<sup>149</sup> Mark uses the figure four times (3:5; 6:52; 8:17; 10:5). Luke omits three of these, and in the fourth also omits 'hardness of heart'. Matthew gives all four, but retains 'hardness of heart' only in the divorce pericope (Mt 19:8).

<sup>150</sup> οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδιά πεπωρωμένη (Mark 6:52).

Do you not yet perceive or understand?  
 Do you have a hardened heart?  
 Having eyes, do you not see? and having ears, do you not hear?<sup>151</sup>

I will explore the anthropological significance of the ‘hardened heart’ in Chapter 5. It is worth noting here that Jesus always perceives and understands perfectly. He knows (2:8; 8:17 [γνοῦς]; 12:15 [εἰδὼς]) and ‘sees’ (12:28, 34 [ἰδὼν]) what others do not perceive clearly. The emphasis on this level of understanding functions not only to direct attention to Jesus’ divine origin<sup>152</sup> but also to remind the audience of the limitations of their own understanding, and therefore their need to believe in him.

### **The rhetorical pressure of the metaphor**

There is a constant interplay of understanding and non-understanding throughout the Gospel. This means that the Gospel’s audience is continually presented with an implicit challenge: are they among those who understand, or those who do not understand? This challenge comes (1) through identification with characters, (2) through the symbolism of the healing stories and (3) through direct application of the metaphor cluster.

#### *1. Audience identification with perceptions of the characters*

Distorted perceptions are represented by the ‘blindness’ and ‘deafness’ of the

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<sup>151</sup> οὐπω νοεῖτε οὐδὲ συνίετε;  
 πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν;  
 ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὦτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε; (Mark 8:17, 18).

<sup>152</sup> Jesus’ repeated query, ‘Do you not understand?’ (4:13; 8:17, 21] echoes the rhetorical questions of Isaiah 40:21, 28—‘Do you not know? Have you not heard? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ... The LORD’s understanding is unfathomable’. The import is that God is the only one who really understands.



disciples and other characters.<sup>153</sup> There is a strong theme in the Gospel whereby Jesus' disciples do not understand what he says and does:

They do not understand the parable of the sower (4:13).  
 They do not understand who Jesus is after he calms the storm (4:41).  
 They do not understand about the loaves (6:52).  
 They do not understand the defilement parable (7:18).  
 They act as if the first feeding miracle had not happened (8:4).  
 They do not understand implications of the second feeding miracle (8:17-21).  
 Peter does not understand 'the things of God' (8:33).  
 They do not understand the second passion prediction (9:32).  
 They show defective understanding of the kingdom of God (9:34; 10:35-37).  
 They fail to watch in Gethsemane and do not know what to say (14:37, 40).

Other characters in the story demonstrate distorted perceptions, described by one commentator as 'spiritual shortsightedness'.<sup>154</sup> They are confused about Jesus' identity, or identify him incorrectly:<sup>155</sup>

The scribes' questions demonstrate incomprehension (2:6, 7, 16, 18, 24).  
 They attribute Jesus' behaviour to demon possession (3:22, 30).  
 Jesus' family do not understand him: 'He is out of his mind' (3:21).  
 The people of his own town see him only as a carpenter (6:3).  
 Herod does not understand who Jesus is (6:16).  
 The Pharisees do not recognise his authority (8:11).  
 Many see him as John the Baptist, Elijah, or 'one of the prophets' (8:28).  
 Scribes and elders are uncomprehending (11:33).  
 Jesus states their ignorance (12:24).  
 Guests do not understand about the perfume (14:4).  
 The high priest interprets Jesus' words as blasphemy (14:64).  
 Pilate does not understand who Jesus is (15:1-15).  
 The soldiers, passersby and chief priests do not understand (15:16-32).  
 The bystanders misinterpret Jesus' cry from the cross (15:34, 35).

The rhetorical force of this many-faceted incomprehension depends on the fact that the readers or hearers of the Gospel (at least the Christians among them) actually know and understand more than the disciples and other characters in the story. This

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<sup>153</sup> It is interesting to compare differences in the treatment of misunderstanding in the Gospels of Mark and John. In both, misunderstanding may be a narrative strategy to reorient the reader. However, misunderstanding in Mark is not resolved as it is in John: see Kelli S. O'Brien, "Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric," *CBQ* 67 (2005): 284-302.

<sup>154</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 230.

<sup>155</sup> While Jesus is appropriately perceived as 'Rabbi' (9:5; 11:21; 14:45) and 'Teacher' (9:38; 10:17, 35; 13:1; and 14:14, where Jesus uses the title of himself), these honorary titles are clearly inadequate for a full recognition of Jesus as Son of God.

gives them opportunities to interact with the story as it is being read, to make links with other parts of the story that are hidden from the disciples, and to make and share insightful interpretations of veiled sayings and actions.<sup>156</sup>

Alongside false perceptions, many characters demonstrate authentic perceptions:

The demons always know who Jesus is (1:24, 34; 3:11; 5:7).  
 The Syrophoenician woman instantly understands Jesus' 'dog' parable (7:25).  
 Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ (8:29).  
 Bartimaeus identifies Jesus as Son of David (10:47).  
 One scribe is commended for his correct understanding (12:28-34).  
 Jesus commends the woman with the perfume for insightful action (14:3-9).  
 The centurion identifies Jesus as Son of God (15:39).

In all of this, the rhetorical pressure on the audience is to understand what the disciples and others have not understood, that is, to perceive correctly in the manner of those characters who have demonstrated a true understanding. In 8:18 Jesus attributes to his 'insider' disciples the same unseeing eyes and unhearing ears as those he applied to outsiders (4:12). While his repeated question, 'Do you not yet understand?' (8:17, 21) probably signals a note of exasperation and lamentation,<sup>157</sup> the 'yet' (οὐπω) in the question could equally signify a hopeful future acquisition of understanding for the disciples<sup>158</sup>—a degree of understanding that many of the Gospel's post-resurrection audience may well already have.

Fear, although it is, of course, a characteristic response to a theophany or to exposure to the 'supernatural', seems also to indicate a lack of true perception in several episodes. When Jesus calms the storm, the disciples in fear (φοβέομαι, 4:41) ask, 'Who is this?' The rhetorical question, while perhaps revealing that the

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<sup>156</sup> See further Fowler, *Reader*, 121–22.

<sup>157</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 225; James Edwards, R., *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 239–40; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 387.

<sup>158</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 283; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 161; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 508, 513.



disciples have not yet perceived Jesus correctly, certainly calls for the audience to do so. Though they ‘see’ (5:14,15,16), the people of Gerasa fear Jesus (φοβέομαι, 5:15) and do not perceive him correctly. The disciples, ‘seeing’ Jesus walking on the sea (6:49-50), suppose him to be a ghost. This misperception causes fear, and Jesus tells them not to be afraid (φοβέομαι, 6:50). Fear (ἔκφοβος, 9:6) characterises Peter’s lack of perception also on the transfiguration mountain.

## 2. Symbolism in the healing stories

Alongside the narratives in which characters perceive and understand (whether correctly or incorrectly) there are several stories in which Jesus heals blind and deaf individuals. On the ‘story’ level these physical healings identify Jesus as the eschatological deliverer, fulfilling prophecies such as Isaiah 35:5-8, but on the ‘discourse’ level the blindness and deafness they speak of are very likely to have been taken figuratively.

The story of the two-stage healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26) is placed significantly between Jesus’ chiding of the disciples for their incomprehension and Peter’s correct (albeit partial) identification of Jesus as the Christ:

8:14-21	The disciples are ‘blind’ and ‘deaf’
8:22-26	Healing of the blind man
8:27-30	Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ

Because of this position, the two-stage healing of the blind man has been taken as paradigmatic—as an acted parable portraying the disciples’ gradual enlightenment as their faulty perception of Jesus is corrected. Frank Matera suggests that the miracle signifies that the disciples’ eyes have been opened *at this point*, that their hardness of heart has been removed, and that they now understand everything clearly.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Frank J. Matera, “Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter’s Confession (Mark 6:14–8:30),”

However, it is clear in the material that follows the pericope (e.g., 9:32; 10:35-37) that many misconceptions remain. Therefore it is more appropriate to take the miracle as a sign of hope that the disciples' lack of perception *will* be remedied—that they will eventually gain their full sight. Since the disciples are never seen to attain great insight in the narrative, their 'second touch' may be the resurrection of Jesus, or the coming to them of the Holy Spirit.<sup>160</sup> In any case, Elizabeth Malbon is probably correct in her view that this miracle symbolises the necessity for repeated hearing (for literate audiences, re-reading) before the story's message is really understood.<sup>161</sup>

The other story of the healing of a blind man occurs in Mark 10:46-52, in which the blind beggar Bartimaeus regains his sight. Several factors contribute to the rhetorical significance of this pericope. First, its placement within the structure of the Gospel is significant. The two healings of blind men form an *inclusio* around the section of the Gospel that comprises the passion predictions and a concentration of discipleship material. Here there is a repeated pattern of prediction, misunderstanding and teaching on discipleship:

8:22-26	<b>Blind man's healing in stages</b>
8:27-30	Peter's semi-correct identification of Jesus
8:31	<b>1st passion prediction</b>
8:32-33	Peter's misunderstanding
8:34-38	Teaching on discipleship
9:1-13	Jesus' transfiguration
9:14-29	Deaf boy's healing through exorcism
9:30-31	<b>2nd passion prediction</b>
9:32-34	Disciples' misunderstanding
9:35-10:31	Teaching on servanthood, etc.
10:32-34	<b>3rd passion prediction</b>
10:35-41	Disciples' misunderstanding
10:42-45	Teaching on servanthood, etc.
10:46-52	<b>Blind man's healing</b>

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*Biblica* 70 (1989): 153–72.

<sup>160</sup> Earl S. Johnson, "Mark 8:22–26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida," *NTS* 25 (1979): 383; Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8:26, WBC, Vol. 34A* (Waco: Word, 1989), 430, 436.

<sup>161</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowings in Mark 4–8: Reading and Rereading," *JBL* 112 (1993): 228–30.



The three passion predictions in this section challenge the disciples' understanding of Jesus' destiny: although he is the Christ, as Peter has identified him (8:29), this identification is incomplete, for he is to suffer and be killed. Jesus therefore attempts to remedy the disciples' deficient understanding both by repetition of the passion prediction and by active teaching episodes that challenge the disciples' grasp of the nature of their own discipleship. They are to share in Jesus' suffering (8:34-38; 10:30), they are to relinquish wealth, status and honour for the sake of following Jesus (10:21-31), they are to have the attitude of servants, not masters (9:35; 10:42-45) and they must pray for faith (9:29). Included in this section are vivid descriptions of Jesus' metamorphosis on the mountain (9:2-8), where the disciples are presented with both visual and auditory revelations of who Jesus is, and the restoration of the hearing of a deaf boy (9:14-29).

This arrangement is very suggestive, as many commentators have noted.<sup>162</sup> Mark provides no explicit correspondence between the gradual gaining of physical sight and the gradual unfolding of insights into the identity of Jesus and the nature of discipleship. The narrative leaves the audience—those who have 'ears to hear'—to make the connection.

Other features of the Bartimaeus story have rhetorical significance. Bartimaeus is the only recipient of a miraculous healing who is named in the Gospel; this may indicate that he is Mark's quintessential example.<sup>163</sup> Bartimaeus is the first human character in Mark's Gospel to announce Jesus' messianic identity correctly and publicly. There is strong irony in the fact that he is blind, since Jesus is misunderstood by almost all of the sighted characters. The pericope can be classified

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<sup>162</sup> These include Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) and Keller, "Opening Blind Eyes". The latter interprets this material as instruction for 'Mark's community'; I have preferred to envision a more generalised audience.

<sup>163</sup> Keller, "Opening Blind Eyes," 156.

as a ‘recognition story’, in which Jesus is correctly perceived and identified.<sup>164</sup> As such, it is a key point in the narrative where the audience, like the beggar, may ‘see’ who Jesus is, or alternatively, question Bartimaeus’s estimation of Jesus. Jesus’ words, ὑπάγε ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε (10:52), identify Bartimaeus’s faith as a significant factor in his healing/salvation.<sup>165</sup> His faith in Jesus as Messiah is confirmed and approved by the healing. Beavis is correct to recognise these words as ‘an unmistakable notice to both disciple and reader or audience to admire and emulate Bartimaeus’s faith’.<sup>166</sup> In addition, to the extent that Bartimaeus is, in his following of Jesus, a model for discipleship, the audience is encouraged to leave all (cf. 1:18; 10:28) and follow Jesus.<sup>167</sup>

Two of Mark’s stories concern the healing of deaf people. The episode in 7:32-37, in which Jesus restores a deaf man’s hearing and speech, seems to find its main significance in its conclusion, where the witnesses declare, ‘He has done all things well; he makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’ (7:37). There are allusions here both to the creation story in Genesis 1 (with a christological implication) and to Isaiah 35:5-6—‘then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped ... and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy’. Mark’s audience can well be imagined to concur with the judgement of the witnesses

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<sup>164</sup> Mary Ann Beavis, “From the Margin to the Way: A Feminist Reading of the Story of Bartimaeus,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14 (1998): 37. The demons’ recognitions are not human, and Peter’s (8:29) is not public. The ‘recognition oracle’ is a feature of ANE prophecy and of Greek tragedy; see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). Aune acknowledges Markan scenes that are formally identical to recognition oracles (273): Mark 1:11, 24; 3:11; 5:6-7; 8:27-30; 9:7; and 15:39.

<sup>165</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, “‘Your Faith Has Made You Whole’: The Evangelical Liberation Theology of Jesus,” in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 76–79, argues compellingly that Mark sees Bartimaeus’s healing as both physical and spiritual and that he derives this understanding from the tradition.

<sup>166</sup> Beavis, “Margin,” 34, 38.

<sup>167</sup> There is a similarity to the demoniac of 5:1-20, in that both disregard, in different senses, Jesus’ instruction to ‘go away’ (ὑπάγε, 5:20; 10:52), and instead begin to follow him (again, in different senses).



in the story: the kingdom of God is at hand (1:15) and the prophecies of new creation are evidently being fulfilled as the transformative deeds of Jesus are enacted. But the rhetorical significance of the story must also take into account the power of the metaphor of deafness and its cure. Joel Marcus points out that the motif of the opened ear is used in Jewish texts as a symbol for revelation: God opens one's ears for the purpose of hearing his word.<sup>168</sup> The transformation that Mark envisions for his audience is that they, too, should have 'ears to hear'.

Parallel to the 'opened ears' in this story is the 'unshackled tongue'. The language here is rather exorcistic: ἐλύθη ὁ δεσμὸς τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ (7:35). With his restored speech the man is able to join the witnesses in proclaiming the liberation that Jesus has brought—an activity that Mark encourages throughout his Gospel (e.g., 1:45; 5:20; 13:10; 14:9).<sup>169</sup>

The other story of the healing of deafness is told in 9:14-29. It is a more complex story, with a number of elements that show similarities to previous episodes of healing and exorcism. Myers is probably correct to see these as 'subtle elements of analepsis' that encourage us to 'read' healing also as symbolic action.<sup>170</sup> The presenting problem in this story is demon-induced muteness, but Jesus exorcises the 'unclean spirit' as a 'mute and deaf spirit' (9:25).<sup>171</sup> Is there a metaphorical element to the deafness here? Clearly, the thrust of the story is the necessity of faith, the implied rhetorical imperative being that followers of Jesus should believe (9:19,

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<sup>168</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 474–5, 479. 1QH ix:21 has 'You opened my ears to wondrous mysteries'. Compare also Isa 50:4-5, 'The Sovereign Lord ... wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. He has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious.' Similarly, Jer 9:20 exhorts its audience to 'open your ears to the words of his mouth'.

<sup>169</sup> Fowler (*Loaves and Fishes*, 112) suggests that this restored 'proper speech' (ἐλάλει ὀρθῶς, 7:35) contrasts with the disciples' 'verbal ineptness' and 'self-condemning utterances' to which the text often refers, but it is arguable whether this connection is strong enough to be rhetorically significant.

<sup>170</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 254.

<sup>171</sup> Although κωφός can mean 'mute', it is the same word that is used for the deaf man in 7:32, and thus it is usually translated in this passage as 'deaf'.

23, 24) and pray (29). The motif of blindness and deafness in the OT, expressed typically in Isaiah 6:9-10, is a strong indication of stubborn unbelief, conveying ‘the propensity of the human heart to reject God and his ways’.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, unbelief is strongly associated with blindness and deafness in NT texts apart from Mark’s Gospel. John’s Gospel quotes the Isaiah text in response to those who ‘were not believing in him’ (John 12:37-40).<sup>173</sup> Similarly, Luke (reporting the words of Paul) quotes the same Isaiah text in response to those who ‘did not believe’, adding that the Gentiles ‘will hear’ (ἀκούω) (Acts 28:24-28). In the Markan story of the mute and deaf boy, Jesus confronts unbelief by expelling muteness and deafness. When the boy’s father believes, the boy can speak and hear. The disciples cannot perform the exorcism because they have not prayed—they have not yet truly believed nor understood; they are still blind and deaf. Jesus expels deafness, blindness and muteness because they are symptoms of unbelief. The audience, then, may well perceive the blinding and dulling effect of unbelief. They may well take Jesus’ words ‘O unbelieving generation’ (9:19) to be a direct address to them.

### *3. Direct application of the metaphor*

Imperatives in the speeches of Jesus can be readily understood as a form of direct address to the audience, a form which I have discussed above.<sup>174</sup> Most of these imperatives, in fact, belong in the domain of seeing and hearing; here Jesus tells the reader when, where or how to look and listen.<sup>175</sup> Especially forceful are those instances in which the imperative is compounded with other rhetorical features. For example, at the very beginning of the soils parable is a double imperative that urges the audience both to see and to hear: Ἀκούετε. ἰδοὺ... (4:3). Although BAGD classes

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<sup>172</sup> Geoffrey D. Robinson, “Motif,” 184.

<sup>173</sup> Compare also John 9:35-41, which parallels belief/unbelief with sight/blindness.

<sup>174</sup> See p. 63.

<sup>175</sup> Darr, “Watch,” 87.



ἰδοῦ as a demonstrative particle, it is actually an imperative verb ('Look!') that must contribute to the rhetorical force of the speech it prefaces. It urges hearers to pay attention to what follows. The word makes an early appearance in Mark's Gospel, introducing the message of 'Isaiah the prophet' (1:2) and the theme of seeing. The hearing theme is introduced in the same quotation: 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness' (1:3).

Other imperatives are compounded with inclusive forms in which members of the audience are able to recognise themselves as addressees: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' (4:9, 23); 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand' (7:14). The imperative 'Take heed to yourselves' (13:9) is particularly compelling with its emphatic subject and reflexive pronoun: Βλέπετε δὲ ὑμεῖς ἑαυτοὺς. This warning will have been extremely relevant to the original audiences, since it predicts persecutions soon to arise.

The inclusive form 'any place' (ὅς ἂν τόπος, 6:11) clearly refers metonymically to those who are presented with the proclamation of the 'good news'; here Jesus issues a vivid castigation of those who do not receive or hear (ἀκούω) the word;<sup>176</sup> this functions as a warning to the audience.

### **The content of understanding: transformations in Mark's view**

The rhetoric of the seeing-hearing metaphor urges the audience to perceive and understand correctly. But what, exactly, is to be perceived and understood? Mark is explicit about some components of this knowledge, but other components are implicit. In the pericopae where the metaphor is most prominent, the text does not specify particular aspects of knowledge. In fact, in the context of the parables the

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<sup>176</sup> 'Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them' (Mark 6:11).

content is designated a *μυστήριον* (4:11), while the nature of the disciples' (non)understanding in 8:14-21 is veiled, to say the least.

There are some aspects of comprehension that Mark expresses in the words of Jesus. Jesus clearly wants his hearers to understand the true nature of defilement (7:14-18), the priority of 'God's things' (8:33), the necessity of wholehearted commitment to God (12:28-34), the relationship of Jesus to God and to the custodians of Israel (12:1-12), the truth and significance of his own passion (8:31; 9:32; 14:4), and an accurate perception of 'the scriptures and the power of God' (12:24). Many other aspects of understanding are evident as implications of Jesus' teachings and of narrative events. For example, in contrast with the elders of Israel, the audience is to understand that Jesus can forgive sins (2:7) and that he abrogates certain requirements of the Law (2:16, 18, 24; 3:2, 5). All of these acquisitions of knowledge are potentially transformative.

But Mark, as the author and narrator of the text, is also identifiably concerned that the reader should understand correctly. His strangely intrusive parenthesis, 'Let the reader understand' (13:14) surely applies to much more than one's interpretation of 'the abomination of desolation'. Grasping the true identity of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God is a major concern for Mark, and he makes it abundantly clear that those who 'see' him correctly possess the transformed perspective that will enable them to become faithful followers of Jesus.

However, it is important to recognise that Mark's story acknowledges the possibility of a correct *conceptual* understanding of something without an *existential* understanding.<sup>177</sup> The Temple officials truly perceive (*γινώσκω*, 12:12) the intellectual content of Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants, and they acknowledge (*οἶδαμεν*, 12:14) that Jesus teaches 'the way of God in truth'. Yet their perception

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<sup>177</sup> Dan O. Via, *Self-Deception and Wholeness in Paul and Matthew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 111.



does not shape their existence or conduct—it does not touch their hearts. Jesus says that they do not *really* know the scriptures nor the power of God (12:24). Mark labels this characteristic ‘hypocrisy’ (12:15). The meaning of ὑπόκρισις is notoriously hard to nail down, but Dan Via suggests reasonably that it denotes a blindness to reality—a lack of integrity, a disparity between the outer (the act, the ‘cover story’) and the inner (the heart, the ‘real story’).<sup>178</sup> The cognate noun ὑποκριτής is used in 7:6 to characterize those who demonstrate a disparity between lips and heart. It is clear that, for Mark, hearing has to be the ‘hearing-with-understanding’ that is synonymous with faith,<sup>179</sup> the understanding that is characteristic of an ‘unhardened heart’. In David Smith’s words, ‘Mark is ... pushing the audience to “see” beyond the limited human level of perception and to grasp life from the divine point of view’.<sup>180</sup>

## 2.6 The rhetoric of performance

A different perspective on the rhetoric of Mark’s Gospel arises from recent studies that have highlighted the probability that texts like Mark’s Gospel would have been presented originally in oral performance. A consideration of this element here is not out of place because, although the performance itself belongs to ‘the world in front of the text’, it is fully dependent on the text, employing and realising its rhetorical resources. It not only brings an added dimension to the text, enhancing its reception

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<sup>178</sup> Via, *Self-Deception*, 92–98.

<sup>179</sup> Dan O. Via, *The Revelation of God And/as Human Reception in the New Testament* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 108. Compare שִׁמְעָ לִי, the ‘hearing heart’ that Solomon prayed for (1 Kings 3:9); the participle here has the connotation of ‘understanding, obeying’. Note also the ‘understanding with the heart’ in Isa 6:10, the text that lies behind Mark 4:12.

<sup>180</sup> David F. Smith, “Can We Hear?” 210.

by the audience, but also reveals elements of the text that may otherwise be overlooked.

The story would be told in front of a gathered audience, in a semi-dramatic style, with dialogue spoken in character and accompanied by much gesturing. Whitney Shiner's recent book, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark*, makes a strong case for this scenario, and gives a detailed account of styles of delivery, gesture and movement, and the techniques of emotional appeal. Such performances would emphasise emotional impact. The storyteller would work hard to convey the emotional content in the story, and to move the audience to appropriate responses.<sup>181</sup>

David F. Smith approaches Mark's Gospel in a similar way. Building on the work of Fowler, he sees it, not as a 'textual container that houses cognitive propositions' but as 'a community-shaping hearing-centred reading-event.'<sup>182</sup> He examines a number of Markan passages in detail, highlighting the inherent textual directions for performance, and their probable effects on the audience. Smith identifies techniques by which the storyteller draws the story world into the present life of the listeners. Most useful and powerful for this purpose are the strategies that Smith designates 'direct address'. This term has been discussed above (p. 64). Smith's definition is 'an active interchange between reader and audience'.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Shiner, *Proclaiming*. See also Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Chapter 3; Malbon, *Hearing Mark*; and Shiner, "Applause". For a comprehensive introduction to the emerging field of performance criticism, see David Rhoads' two-part study: David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I," *BTB* 36 (2006): 118–33; David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part II," *BTB* 36 (2006): 164–84.

<sup>182</sup> David F. Smith, "Can We Hear?" 170.

<sup>183</sup> For Smith, the 'reader' is not the listener (audience) but the one who stands in the place of the author as the performer of the text ("Can We Hear?" 60–99). While acknowledging the historical legitimacy of Smith's reading scenario, to avoid confusion I will retain the traditional equivalence of the terms 'reader' and 'audience', assuming that first-century readers will be, in the main, hearers.



Following Shiner, Smith notes the following four types of direct address:<sup>184</sup>

### 1. *Emotional and vocal markers*

These are textual clues that guide the oral performer in his or her efforts to ‘bring the story to life’. They indicate changes in voice, tone, mood, posture and animation to match that of the characters in the story. Such emotive reactions include amazement, fear, anger and grief, which all abound in Mark’s Gospel.<sup>185</sup>

### 2. *Inclusive dialogue*

The performer is in the position to indicate whether or not a second person dialogue should include the audience. If it does, the audience hears the pronoun ‘you’ (or imperatival forms) as addressed directly to them as much as to the addressees in the story. The classic example is Mark 13:36, ‘What I say to *you* I say to *all*: watch!’ This saying also contains an example of another vehicle for audience inclusion: forms of the word *πάς*. At 14:27 the Markan Jesus places *πάντες* in an emphatic (initial) position in his shocking prediction that *all* his disciples would become deserters (*σκανδαλίζω*). This proposition is repeated in 14:29, where Peter rebuts it, as do *all* of the disciples (14:31). However, at 14:50 they *all* desert him, *πάντες* again appearing in an emphatic (final) position. The use of this word presents the audience with an implicit challenge: how will they respond to the possibility of denying Jesus?

### 3. *Narrative asides*

Smith prefers to label this as ‘reader commentary’. Inserted into the narrative are parenthetical remarks that elaborate for the audience a description, cause, purpose or

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<sup>184</sup> David F. Smith, “Can We Hear?” 175–83.

<sup>185</sup> Not least in the material surrounding the Gerasene demoniac story; see Geyer, *Fear*.

result. An example is Mark 7:19, 'Thus he declared all foods clean.' Sometimes an *anacoluthon* or some awkwardness in the text indicates the presence of such commentary. The description of the demoniac in 5:3-5 would be an example.

#### 4. *Insider information*

This is commentary that gives the audience information and insight beyond the knowledge or perception of the characters in the story. For example, 'Jesus saw their faith' (Mark 2:5). By this means the audience is able to share the narrator's perspective, and thereby be better equipped to form their own response.

Dramatic performance creates its effect as much by showing as by telling. It plays on the affective domain as much as on the cognitive. Mark's Gospel is a dramatic narrative which has much potential for visualisation on the part of the audience. In addition, it often presents people in situations of crisis or need, in which extreme emotions are involved.<sup>186</sup> The audience is invited (indeed, even pressured) to participate. Mark does not seek only to persuade the mind, but, through the emotions,<sup>187</sup> to influence the 'whole person'.<sup>188</sup> His writing is better described as 'emotion-fused thought' than as intellectual discourse.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> On the affective elements of Mark's Gospel, see further Incigneri, *Gospel*, 51–56, and Steele, "Having Root," 37–47. Geyer, *Fear*, examines in detail aspects of the Gospel that he calls 'the 'anomalous frightful'; these are passages that promote in the reader feelings of dissatisfaction, agitation, unsettledness and confusion. However, I believe Geyer overemphasises these aspects.

<sup>187</sup> Mark's appeal to the senses is limited. Charles Hedrick notes several areas of 'conceptual imprecision' in the Gospel. Charles W. Hedrick, "Conceiving the Narrative: Colors in Achilles Tatius and the Gospel of Mark," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 177–97.

<sup>188</sup> I make this distinction here not because it is Mark's but because it is a modern one. Interiority, in the thinking of the ancient Near East, is not as compartmentalised as modern Western concepts. E.g., Mark does not see heart, soul, mind and strength (12:30, 33) as divisions within a person. See Robert A. Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 231.

<sup>189</sup> Malina, *Social World*, 61.



Importantly, the dramatic medium has the potential to highlight, both visually and orally, repeated elements that might be missed in a perusal of the written text. The significance of ‘doublets’ in Mark has often been noted. Some scholars prefer to call them ‘echoes and foreshadowings’.<sup>190</sup> Among these repeated elements are:

- Three exorcisms (1:21-28; 5:1-20; 9:14-29)
- Two feeding stories (6:33-44; 8:1-9)
- Three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34)
- Numerous sea crossings (4:35; 5:21; 6:45; 8:10, 13)
- Parable followed by explanation (4:1-34; 7:14-23)<sup>191</sup>

The audience hears (and sees, if the performer chooses to visualise it) the repeated elements and recognises the connections; understanding is thus enhanced.

In addition, Mark’s frequent use of the ‘historic present’ (over 150 times, when other authors would have used the simple past tense)<sup>192</sup> is often said to lend a sense of immediacy and vividness to the narrative. Recent studies indicate that its function is indeed a dramatic one, but, rather than ‘drawing the past into the present’, it is used structurally, often appearing at the beginning of a paragraph, drawing attention to crucial events or highlighting new scenes or actors in the narrative.<sup>193</sup>

The word εὐθύς (used 41 times in Mark) is often translated ‘immediately’ and is usually considered to give a sense of urgency to the narrative,<sup>194</sup> but its most common function may be merely conjunctive, in the sense of ‘so next’.<sup>195</sup> Even so, it

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<sup>190</sup> Malbon, “Echoes.”

<sup>191</sup> Malbon, “Echoes,” 218.

<sup>192</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 26.

<sup>193</sup> Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 101–04. See also Stephanie L. Black, “The Historic Present in Matthew: Beyond Speech Margins,” in *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 120–39.

<sup>194</sup> E.g., Hooker, *Mark*, 45.

<sup>195</sup> Harold Riley, *The Making of Mark: An Exploration* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 215–18. For a more recent discussion see Decker, *Temporal Deixis*, 73–77.

is a feature that could be exploited in performance to enhance the sequentiality of the narrative.

A dramatic performance of the Gospel potentially heightens the effects of all the rhetorical elements I have discussed in the preceding sections. The performer is in a position to make the most of any or all of the techniques in the effort to persuade.

## Conclusions

I have been arguing in this chapter that the narrative content, didactic content and literary formulation of Mark's Gospel all demonstrate a strongly rhetorical thrust. According to all the gospel writers, Jesus aimed to change people's attitudes, and Mark shares this goal, as does Paul. Mark's Gospel is a document of persuasion that seeks to draw its readers to embrace a new world view characterised by an attachment of loyalty to Jesus. The text is directed towards its audience in ways which suggest strongly that the transformation of the readers or hearers is ultimately its major concern. The narrator tells the story of Jesus for the purpose of moving his audience. To summarise the material in this chapter:

1. By styling his entire text 'good news', Mark has made an overt rhetorical move. This 'news' demands evaluation and response on the part of the audience. Robert Humphrey expresses this well:

To follow Jesus, whatever the cost, is, quite clearly, what Mark sought to motivate his audience to do by his telling of 'the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ' (1:1). The completion, and end, of that news will be when those who listen to this narrative, hear and follow him.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Humphrey, *Narrative Structure*, 291.



2. By providing many narrative instances of change in the lives of characters, Mark has opened to the audience the possibility that similar changes may be effected in their own lives. By presenting Jesus as the direct or indirect agent of such changes, and as a person who evokes responses of wonder and amazement, Mark has challenged the audience to evaluate Jesus for themselves and to respond to him in their own way.
3. A large amount of material in the Gospel reports Jesus' teaching, delivered with the voice of divine authority and often couched in terms the audience would receive as 'direct address'. Most of this teaching urges the necessity of radical change that has transformative implications for personal and communal life.
4. Mark's Gospel makes many demands on its audience through its quality of openness and 'indirect' communication (figurative language, ambiguity and opacity), forcing the reader(s) to be actively engaged in the process of making meaning, and thereby encouraging their transformation.
5. The recurrent extended metaphor of blindness and deafness, together with the associated theme of understanding and misunderstanding, questions the perceptions of the audience as well as of the characters, urging them to see and understand with the divine perspective that Jesus models.
6. Integral to the Gospel are emotional and dramatic elements that are directed towards the audience. In an oral presentation or 'performance' of the text these provide an added dimension of vividness and urgency to its rhetorical appeal.

Mark's Gospel can indeed legitimately be classed as transformative discourse. The transformation of human persons seems to be an almost ubiquitous theme of the Gospel. A narrative of so much change and potential change inevitably calls the audience to respond—to agree with one teaching or another, to identify with characters, to empathise with characters, to 'take sides' and to make personal responses to the explicit and implicit questions raised in the text. It aims to change the readers' perceptions of Jesus and to transform their self-understanding and their value system.

The rhetorical effects of the various elements considered above are cumulative. The Gospel is a multi-faceted work, the different facets of which will not all be apprehended by all readers or hearers. Each reader, however, will be moved by some of them. Taken together, they enable the construction of a cumulative picture of the kinds of transformation envisaged by the author. Such a picture will be a representation of the hypothetical 'implied reader'.<sup>197</sup>

My task in Chapter 5 will be to characterise in more detail the readers Mark envisages. Meanwhile, I believe that it is reasonable to conclude that such readers will have at least the following characteristics. They may be Jews or Gentiles. They have been amazed at Jesus. They have 'seen' who Jesus is. They do not have 'hard hearts'. They have faith, or are willing to acknowledge their lack of faith. They have decided to follow Jesus. Their worldview and their values are changing as the kingdom of God is being revealed. They are becoming aware, from a post-resurrection perspective, of their own transformation—individually, and as a community constituted by the story and embodying the story.

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<sup>197</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 137, state that 'by reconstructing the hypothetical implied reader from the responses suggested throughout the narrative of Mark's Gospel, we can identify some of the overarching effects this story might have on the reader.'



Having taken an overview of the Gospel, it is now time to focus on one particular pericope, Mark 5:1-20, which I will treat exegetically as a case study of a character who is radically transformed. Chapter 4 will then address the question of the place of this pericope in the overall rhetorical scheme outlined above.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DEMONIAK IN MARK 5:1-20

#### Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated that Mark's Gospel is driven by a rhetorical purpose. The author, through his choice of narrative episodes, strongly highlights cases of personal transformation, and through his presentation of didactic content, presents to his readers the necessity for their own personal transformation. Moreover, by means of the rhetorical strategies he has used, these presentations exert a 'pressure' on the readers, encouraging them to make their own responses to Jesus.

It is time now to look in detail at one particular passage. I take as a case study the text that narrates Jesus' liberation of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). This is probably the most graphic and dramatic transformation in the Gospel, apart from Jesus' own later metamorphosis (9:2). Perhaps an indication of its importance to Mark is the fact that it is the longest and most detailed miracle story in the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 4 I will examine the placement of the story in the literary and rhetorical context of the Gospel as a whole, but for now it is appropriate to focus on the story itself. This episode plays a significant part in advancing the transformative discourse of the Gospel. At the conclusion of the chapter I will address the question of its potential influence on its readers, and how this influence might work.

My approach here is necessarily multidisciplinary. The theme of my enquiry demands that we keep one eye on the theological and rhetorical interests of Mark's

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<sup>1</sup> The story has 324 words. Outside the Passion narrative, the longest pericopae are 5:21-43 (the 'sandwiched' stories of Jairus' daughter and the haemorrhagic woman, 368 words), 7:1-23 (the defilement teaching, 358 words) and 4:1-20 (the sower parable and its interpretation, 348 words).



text and the other on the readers' construction of meaning and likely responses, without losing sight of the social and political realities that form the historical context of the whole communication. There is a richness to be gained from combining the insights of redaction studies, narrative and rhetorical criticisms, reader-response and social-scientific approaches. I will draw on all of these as I seek to exegete the story, giving particular attention to the transformation of the demoniac.

### 3.1 The structure of the pericope

A brief synopsis of the story is in order. Jesus meets a violent and distressed outcast who is 'demon-possessed'. Commencing to cast out the demon, Jesus engages in a verbal interchange with the man. It becomes clear that a plurality of demons (λεγιών) inhabits the man, and by mutual agreement Jesus sends them into a nearby herd of pigs, who rush into the lake and are drowned. The people of the district gather, and note with amazement that the man has changed dramatically. However, for reasons that remain unexpressed, they tell Jesus to go away. The man, now 'in his right mind', begs Jesus to let him become a disciple, but Jesus sends him home to tell his story.

Interpreters divide up the narrative in a variety of ways, few of which really matter as far as its meaning is concerned.<sup>2</sup> The chiastic scheme below is adapted from that proposed by Francis Moloney.<sup>3</sup> These structural elements may indicate

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<sup>2</sup> John Goldingay reminds us that the positing of various structures in literary works is part of the activity of the reader and thus a subjective enterprise; different aspects of the story's meaning emerge from various analyses of its structure. Goldingay, "How Far?" 7.

<sup>3</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 102. My outline takes fuller account of the literary integrity of Jesus' interaction with the man/demons than does that of Moloney, who regards the episode of the swine (11-14a) as a Markan insertion, as do John F. Craghan, "The Gerasene Demoniac," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 522-36 and Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark*, trans. D. Madvig (London: SPCK, 1971), 111-13. The evidence for such redaction is not conclusive.

Mark's skill and care in writing, as Moloney suggests, but more probably are intrinsic to the story as narrated in the tradition Mark received.

- [A] Introduction: the possessed man's approach to Jesus (5:1-5)
- [B] Jesus' encounter with the possessed man (5:6-12)
- [C] The demons depart into the herd of swine (5:13)
- [B'] Jesus' encounter with the townspeople (5:14-17)
- [A'] Conclusion: the cleansed man's approach to Jesus (5:18-20)

The exegesis below follows this outline, although I will tend to give more attention to A, B and A' because of my particular focus on the demoniac himself.

### 3.2 Jesus meets the demoniac (5:1-5)

The story is connected to the previous pericope by a boat journey. Attention to this literary context and its influence on the discourse is given in the next chapter. Jesus, presumably together with his disciples, although they are not mentioned, arrives on the eastern shore of the lake, in the region of the Gerasenes (5:1). I will discuss this setting later, in the context of the ethnic location of the demoniac.

As soon as Jesus gets out of the boat, he is met by a man 'out of the tombs'—a man 'with an unclean spirit' (5:2). The designation πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is repeated in verses 8 and 13, but the man is later referred to in verses 15, 16 and 18 as δαιμονιζόμενος ('demonised', or 'demon-possessed'). Clearly, Mark regards the 'unclean spirit' as a demon.<sup>4</sup> These two designations are also used synonymously in two other passages: the πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα of 6:7 are the δαιμόνια of 6:13, and the πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον of 7:25 is the δαιμόνιον of 7:26-30. The presence of these demonic beings is obviously a reality for Mark, for he refers to them in 11 passages throughout the first two-thirds of the Gospel. It is important for the purpose of this

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<sup>4</sup> These two designations are used with about equal frequency in Mark. Πνεῦμα is used in 1:26,27,23; 3:11,30; 5:2,8,13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:17,20,25. The noun δαιμόνιον or the verb δαιμονίζομαι is used in 1:32,34,39; 3:15,22; 5:15,16,18; 6:13; 7:26,29,30; 9:38.



study to give some attention to the kinds of ideas about demon possession that might have been held by Mark and his original readers.

### **Demonic possession in the first-century world**

The phenomenon of demonic possession is recognised as an important and pervasive element of the Hellenistic world-view. It is attested by all the Gospel writers. It was widely believed in the ancient world that demons can harass and oppress human beings, and even enter them in order to control their actions. The latter situation, in which the demonic entity is internalised, is the one usually termed ‘demon-possession.’<sup>5</sup>

The aetiology of the concept of demons in the context of Judaism has been traced with a reasonable degree of probability.<sup>6</sup> In the biblical Hebrew texts there is little emphasis on demons. Twice the word  $\text{שִׁדְדִּים}$  is used in the context of sacrifice to idols (Dt 32:17; Ps 106:37). This word had a Babylonian origin: *shêdu* signified a supernatural being either good or evil, but usually less powerful than a god.<sup>7</sup> In the Hebrew scriptures the  $\text{שִׁדְדִּים}$  are ‘demythologised’ to the level of idols; although these are called  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי עֵץ וָאֶבֶן}$ , they are merely ‘gods of wood and stone’ (Dt 28:64).

It is well known that in Classical and Hellenistic Greek literature  $\delta\alpha\iota\mu\acute{o}\nu\epsilon\varsigma$  and  $\delta\alpha\iota\mu\acute{o}\nu\iota\alpha$  are portrayed as divine or semidivine spirits that are not necessarily

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<sup>5</sup> See below for a definition of ‘possession’. The equally non-specific term ‘demonisation’ is etymologically closer to  $\delta\alpha\iota\mu\acute{o}\nu\iota\zeta\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ , but I avoid its regular use because of possible confusion with its more usual English meaning.

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of ancient understandings of demon possession, see, amongst others, James D.G. Dunn and Graham H. Twelftree, “Demon-Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament,” *Churchman* 94 (1980): 210–25; Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993); Philip S. Alexander, “The Demonology of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 331–53; and Archie T. Wright, “Breaching the Cosmic Order: The Biblical Tradition of Genesis 6:1–4 and Its Reception in Early Enochic and Philonic Judaism,” Ph.D. thesis (University of Durham, UK, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Victor Hamilton, “ $\text{שִׁדְדִּים}$ ,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 905–06.

evil—they include what Jewish writings call angels (מַלְאָכִים, ἄγγελοι).<sup>8</sup> However, in Greek drama the malicious figure of the ἀλάστωρ sometimes appears as an avenging spirit impersonating the gods,<sup>9</sup> and so does the howling, winged, wild-eyed ἐρινυς, the ‘standard image of terror in Greek literature and iconography.’<sup>10</sup>

The translators of the LXX consistently used δαιμόνια to translate not only עֲדִימִים but also אֱלֹהִיִּם (idols),<sup>11</sup> effectively ‘personalising’ the latter and perhaps indicating that they did, in fact, possess some supernatural power. The result of this translation was that a strongly and consistently negative connotation was brought to the idea of the demonic: for Jews, δαιμόνια were now objects of worship usurping the place of God. This way of thinking is reflected in Paul’s interpretation of pagan idols as demons (1 Cor 10:19-21),<sup>12</sup> but by Paul’s time Jewish demonology had developed even further, largely on account of the influence of the books now known as *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*.<sup>13</sup>

Exposure to Persian mythology is possibly one reason why post-exilic Judaism saw the emergence of much more diversified ideas about the demonic. The author of *The Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 1-36, written in the late 4th or early 3rd century BCE) provided a narrative that explained the existence of evil spirits and their activities, and integrated them into the Jewish monotheistic world-view.<sup>14</sup> That

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Frieden, “The Language of Demonic Possession: A Key-Word Analysis,” in *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, ed. Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 85.

<sup>10</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 90.

<sup>11</sup> See Dt 32:17; Ps 96:5; Ps 106:37; Isa 65:3, 11; Bar 4:7.

<sup>12</sup> On this see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 472.

<sup>13</sup> For commentaries on the influence of *1 Enoch* on early Christian theology, see E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 1*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 8 and George W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 71–125.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, “Demonology,” 351–352.



narrative expands Genesis 6:1-4. The offspring of human women and the ‘sons of God’ (Watcher angels) are giants (הַנְּפִלִים, translated by γίγαντες in LXX). After their deaths their spirits, released from their bodies, are allowed to roam freely upon the earth. These are called ‘evil spirits’ (πνεύματα πονηρά) or ‘strong spirits’ (πνεύματα ἰσχυρά) in 1 Enoch 15:8-9. Their disposition is to corrupt humanity, to afflict, oppress and cause sorrow (1 Enoch 15:11-16:1). Implied here is that, as disembodied spirits, they seek embodiment, and that they are indeed able to invade the human body.

*Jubilees*, probably written in the period 160-140 BCE, adds to the myth, telling how Noah, following the flood, prayed concerning the ‘unclean demons’ and ‘evil spirits’ that were ‘leading astray and blinding and killing his grandchildren,’ and ‘causing corruption’. The spirits are described as ‘cruel, and created to destroy’ (Jub 10:1-6). Noah’s prayer is answered, and the demons are sent to judgment, but, as a result of the intercession of Mastema, chief of the spirits, one tenth of the demons are allowed to remain on earth and be subject to Mastema/Satan (Jub 10:7-11). Noah apparently receives teaching about healing remedies, and so becomes perhaps the first exorcist or physician (Jub 10:12-14).

The *Genesis Apocryphon* mentions a ‘pestilential spirit’ that afflicts Pharaoh and his servants with some kind of ulcerative skin disorder; here Abram is portrayed as a mediator of exorcistic power through the laying on of hands (1QapGen 20:16ff).<sup>15</sup> *Tobit* rather uniquely features a named demon. It is evident that the Qumran community knew all of this literature and adopted aspects of its demonology.<sup>16</sup> The existence of a complex demonic world is implied in 4Q510 and

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of this story in relation to Jesus as exorcist, see Todd E. Klutz, “The Grammar of Exorcism in the Ancient Mediterranean World,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 156–65.

<sup>16</sup> I am dependent here on Alexander, “Demonology.”

4Q511, which recognise several types of demons: the שדים, along with ‘spirits of the angels of destruction’ (רוחות מלאכי חבל), ‘spirits of the bastards’ (רוחות ממזרים) and three mysterious terms found in Isaiah 13:21 and 34:14—howlers (אחים), yelpers (ציים) and Lilith (לילית). The general designation ‘wicked spirits’ (רוחי רשע) is also found in 4Q511 1:6, and the term ‘destroyer’ (משחית) probably denotes a demon. The differences that characterised these are no longer clear.

In many of the Qumran scrolls ‘lawlessness’ becomes the proper name for the ruler of demons. This is Belial, the angel of enmity (בליעל מלאך משטמה, 1QM 13:10-12). The name Belial is used together with the names Satan, Mastema and the ‘Angel of Darkness’ who is the ruler of all the ‘children of darkness’ and who will finally be defeated by the Sons of Light (the members of the sectarian community) and the good angels.

The term ‘unclean spirit’ (רוח טמאה), vague in Zechariah 13:2, becomes synonymous with demons in the Qumran literature (e.g., 11QPs<sup>a</sup> 19:15). Mark’s Gospel clearly follows this usage. Alexander suggests that ‘unclean’ denotes not merely ‘evil’ but rather the understanding that the ‘unclean’ thing is ‘out of its proper sphere and in the wrong place’; demons are thus seen as beings that pollute not only humanity, but (given the Enochic aetiology) the created world.<sup>17</sup> Kazen shows that links between demons and impurity are present ‘below the surface’ of many Jewish texts by the Second Temple period; it appears that impurity and demon possession were closely associated in popular tradition, so that there was conceptual overlap between exorcism and purification.<sup>18</sup>

This very brief outline of the development of the concept of demons through Greek and Hebrew literature, highlighting the strong influence of intertestamental

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<sup>17</sup> Alexander, “Demonology,” 350.

<sup>18</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 300–13.



Jewish literature,<sup>19</sup> forms the background now for a consideration of the phenomenon of demonic possession. Eric Sorensen has amply surveyed the literature, showing how the influence of malevolent spirits on humans is attested in many ancient cultures, though not all of these occurrences can be called ‘possession’. Sorensen defines demonic possession as ‘a culturally shared belief in the potential for a maleficent spiritual being to disrupt, often in a way observable to others, the well-being of an unwilling host.’<sup>20</sup> This definition can be seen to include both external and internal effects on human beings. While there is indeed a ‘grey area’ between these two categories, the latter is more usually associated with the term ‘possession’—a more or less total take-over of the mind and behaviour of the afflicted individual.<sup>21</sup> Such a state, resulting from the demon’s ‘entering’ the person, calls for exorcism, ‘the forced removal of a hostile spirit for the purpose of restoring the victim of demonic possession to well-being.’<sup>22</sup>

In the writings of early Greece there seems to be little evidence of such *internal* ‘possession’ by distinctly *hostile* spirits, though Sorensen rightly comments that literature does not always accurately reflect folk belief.<sup>23</sup> ‘Possession’ is well-attested, however, but the possessing entities are not categorised in terms of good or evil; they are often gods, and these can operate both beneficently and maleficently. Even consistently harmful spirits act under divine jurisdiction. Exorcism, then, is not seen to be appropriate; rather, the gods are appeased by means of sacrifice and petition.<sup>24</sup> The δαιμόνες manifest themselves by prophetic messages, illness

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<sup>19</sup> Gerbern S. Oegema, “Jesus’ Casting Out of Demons in the Gospel of Mark Against Its Greco-Roman Background,” in *Demons: The Demonology of Israelite-Jewish and Early Christian Literature in Context of Their Environment*, Armin Lange, Hermannn Lichtenberger, and K.F. Diethard Römheld (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 505–18, shows that Mark’s demonology owes little to Greco-Roman tradition.

<sup>20</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> For Berger, *Identity*, 33–35, the ‘person’ in antiquity has ‘permeable boundaries’.

<sup>22</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 1–2.

<sup>23</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 76–77.

<sup>24</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 78–90.

(especially epilepsy) and madness (μανία). The symptoms of madness in Classical Greek literature often closely resemble those familiar to us from NT accounts of demonic possession; they include varieties of antisocial, aggressive and self-abusive behaviour. Apollodorus, for example, tells of the mad daughters of Proetus wandering through the wilderness,<sup>25</sup> and Herodotus tells of the mad king Cleomenes, who had to be restrained in stocks, and who later slew himself with a knife.<sup>26</sup> Individuals under maleficent bondage are treated by binding, imprisonment, medical remedies, cultic healing and purification rituals. The latter include the ritual of the φάρμακοι—the human ‘scapegoats’ that serve to purify the community as they are brutally driven out of the society, perhaps to their deaths.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note that the story of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20 includes many of the elements mentioned: physical restraint, habitation in wild places, self-laceration and exclusion from society.

Similarly, in early ANE literature it is external harassment, not internal possession, that is the sphere of hostile spirit-world activity.<sup>28</sup> This is the case also in the scriptures of Ancient Israel. Here there are only hints of possession by evil spirits, and no explicit evidence of exorcism. King Saul, afflicted by an evil spirit from the Lord (רוח־רָעָה, 1 Sam 16:14), is relieved by David’s harping, which causes the spirit to leave ‘from upon him’ (מֵעָלָיו, 1 Sam 16:23). There are many cases of divine external influence, and in these the language most often used describes the Spirit of God being or coming *upon* a person: Saul (1 Sam 11:6), David (16:13) and the Branch of Jesse (Isa 11:2) are examples. However, the case of Ezekiel seems more like internal possession, for God’s Spirit enters *into* him to cause him to

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<sup>25</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2:2.

<sup>26</sup> Herodotus, *Historiae* 6:75.

<sup>27</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 113–14.

<sup>28</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 31.



prophecy (Ezek 2:2). Similarly, it is said of Daniel (by the Babylonians and Persians) that ‘the spirit of the holy gods is *in* him’ (Dan 4:8-9, 18; 5:11, 14).<sup>29</sup>

Essentially the same situation prevails in the early Jewish pseudepigrapha. In *Jubilees* the divine spirit ‘comes upon’ people (e.g., Jub 25:14; 31:12), but there is little evidence of possession, either divine or demonic. In the Qumran literature it is difficult to discern whether language that denotes the source of evil ethical behaviour is figurative or whether it indicates the actual internal presence of an evil being. For example, ‘I will not keep Belial within my heart’ (1QS 10:21); ‘Cleanse me from the evil plague, and let it not return to me; dry up its roots within me and permit not its leaves to flourish in me’ (11Q5 24:12-13).<sup>30</sup> It is clear that the ethical framework of the *Treatise of the Two Spirits* is based firmly on the view that spirits of light and darkness war with each other in the human heart (1QS 3:13 - 4:26). While it is debatable whether this situation could be counted as internal ‘possession,’ this way of thinking shows that the dualism of opposing spiritual forces had become by this time much more distinct.

Sorensen argues for Zoroastrianism as ‘the primary instigator for the belief in possession and the need for exorcism, by reason of its dualistic and apocalyptic beliefs.’<sup>31</sup> He refers to evidence suggesting that Persian ideas ‘propelled Jewish apocalyptic thought by showing the way to a personified evil, to a doctrine of good

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<sup>29</sup> The prophets’ experience of Spirit possession is examined by Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). The phrase εἰς αὐτόν in Mark 1:10 seems to denote the Spirit descending *into* Jesus, although εἰς may have the sense of *upon* in 11:8; 12:14; 13:3. Fowler (*Let the Reader Understand*, 16) and DeMaris (Richard E. DeMaris, “The Baptism of Jesus: A Ritual-Critical Approach,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 146–49) view Jesus’ baptism as an occasion of Spirit possession, and 3:20-30 supports this, for Jesus implies that the proposition ‘He has Beelzebul’ is blasphemous. See further Norman R. Petersen, “Elijah, the Son of God, and Jesus: Some Issues in the Anthropology of Characterization in Mark,” in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. Werline (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 232–40.

<sup>30</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 18.

and evil spirits and the ethical dualism they represent, and to the opposition between them that culminates in an eschatological battle.’<sup>32</sup> Discrete good and evil spirits, and a final judgment followed by reward and punishment, are found in traditions dating back to before 500 B.C.E. Humans are unavoidably involved in the cosmic struggle between good and evil, for one is permeated by the good or the evil that one chooses. The body is not thought of as a receptacle for the foreign spirit, but by alliance with the spirit one becomes identified with it, in a kind of ‘mutually supportive symbiosis,’<sup>33</sup> and in this sense it is ‘possession’. In this system of thought demons pollute humanity and cause all manner of diseases, and there are rituals for purification as well as formulae to drive off demons. Although conclusive proof is elusive, it appears that this Zoroastrian mythology was a significant source of ideas that developed into the kinds of angelology and demonology we find in late canonical and intertestamental Jewish literature.<sup>34</sup>

It can be seen, then, that the traditions of several cultures converge in a strong sense of human interaction with the supernatural, and, more specifically, with the evil supernatural. By the time of Jesus there seems to have been a general acceptance of the possibility that demons could not only harass people, but actually inhabit the body of a person, and also an acceptance of the need for (and the practice of) driving out such inhabiting demons by established rituals of exorcism.<sup>35</sup> The manifestations of this ‘possession’ were believed to be visible, not only in physical illness but in abnormal and/or morally reprehensible behaviour, sometimes labelled

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<sup>32</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 32–46.

<sup>35</sup> Todd Klutz seems to view (from a modern perspective) Jesus’ exorcisms merely as the ‘re-labeling’ of the impure as pure, rather than (according to traditional cosmologies) as the expulsion of real, personal entities; see Klutz, “Grammar,” 163. Klutz’s point that Jesus was ‘critiquing the traditional priestly health care system’ is well taken, but the Synoptic texts make it clear that Jesus’ healings and exorcisms functioned not simply as re-interpretations of purity status but as powerful physical acts (δυνάμεις) that actually removed the causes of ‘impurity’.



as madness. Thus in Mark's Gospel Jesus' opponents falsely charge him not only with being 'possessed' (Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει, 3:22) but with being 'out of his mind' (ἐξέστη, 3:21). In the Gerasene demoniac both of these conditions are dramatically illustrated.

### **'Among the tombs'**

Immediately after reporting the meeting of the demon-possessed man with Jesus, Mark embarks on a graphic description of the man. Included here are details of his location—his dwelling place in the tombs (5:3a) and his wider environment (5:5a)—and a dramatic description of his extraordinary behaviour, both past (5:4) and present (5:5b). This description, which is, in Fowler's terms, explicit commentary at the 'story' level, functions as a parenthesis that interrupts the action with background information the audience needs in order to grasp the immense extent of the man's eventual transformation. In terms of the rhetoric of performance, this passage gives great scope for the emotional portrayal of distress and frenzy through dramatic gestures and vocalisation.

In explanation of the phrase ἐκ τῶν μνημείων (5:2) Mark states that the man had his dwelling (κατοίκησις) among these tombs. According to Numbers 19:16-22, one who touches a dead human body, bones or graves becomes ritually 'unclean' for seven days, and anything he touches becomes similarly 'unclean'. The readers, then, already alerted to a setting that, for Jews, may be regarded as 'unclean' (Gentile Gerasa, on the 'other side' of the lake) are presented with a man who is 'unclean' by reason of his living in a burial ground, and who has, in addition, an 'unclean spirit'. The appearance of pigs a little later in the story increases, of course, the number of 'unclean' elements.

The activities of the man characterise him as a madman; commentators often note that Mark's description fulfils all four indications of insanity according to rabbinic literature (i.e., running about at night, staying overnight at burial places, tearing apart one's clothes, and destroying what one has been given).<sup>36</sup> Philo refers both to the 'fierce and savage kind' of madman (μεμηνῶς) and also to an actual, but less dangerous, Alexandrian madman, Karabas, who 'spent day and night in the streets naked'.<sup>37</sup>

Through the use of imperfect tenses (εἶχεν, ἦν κράζων, ἦν κατακόπτων) and time phrases (οὐκέτι, πολλάκις, διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας) the text draws attention to the continuity of two aspects of the man's outrageous behaviour—crying out and cutting himself. Both of these activities are well-attested as customary elements of pagan worship, as carried out, for example, by the prophets of Baal in their idolatrous frenzy (1 Kings 18:28). Self-laceration is condemned in the *Temple Scroll* as an unholy, pagan practice: 'You are children belonging to the LORD your God, therefore you are not to gash yourselves ... you must not incise your flesh or tattoo yourselves ... for you are a people holy to the LORD your God ... You are not to do as the nations do.'<sup>38</sup> This injunction echoes those of the Torah, which, together with the Prophets, identify the practice as an element of pagan mourning ritual.<sup>39</sup> So the demoniac's self-laceration, while being a token of demon-influenced self-destruction, may well also indicate some involvement in idolatry.

His crying out could be the kind of wailing that is associated with lamentation and mourning rituals in the East. Hosea 7:14 and Jeremiah 48:36-8 (MT) both mention wailing or vocal lamentation together with self-laceration.

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<sup>36</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 258, citing Strack & Billerbeck 1:491-2.

<sup>37</sup> Philo, *In Flaccum*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> 11Q19-20 (Temple Scroll) 48:11-13. Michael Wise, Martin Jr. Abegg, and Edward Cook, eds. and trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 479.

<sup>39</sup> The Hebrew root is 771; see Lev 19:28; 21:5; Dt 14:1; Jer 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37; Hos 7:14.



Alternatively, crying out may be a recognised characteristic of demons, especially of the kinds designated in 1QM 13:10-12 as ‘howlers’ (חִיָּא) and ‘yelpers’ (חִיָּא)—descriptions derived from Isaiah 13:21, referring to beings that inhabit desolate and abandoned places.<sup>40</sup>

As Joseph Torchia points out, all these elements of the demoniac’s outrageous behaviour constitute a defiled lifestyle; his manifestation of deviant individuality would have been markedly at odds with the values of community espoused by his society.<sup>41</sup>

### ‘Bound with shackles and chains’

A couple of stylistic features in the Greek are interesting. First is the use of three perfect infinitives (δεδέσθαι, διεσπάσθαι and συντετριφθαι). Two of these occur in an arrangement which is chiasmic:

καὶ διεσπάσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ	τὰς ἀλύσεις	(AB)
καὶ τὰς πέδας	συντετριφθαι	(B <sup>1</sup> A <sup>1</sup> )

This chiasm, emphasising the verbs, may function to underline the failure of attempts to control the man.<sup>42</sup> Second, and probably of greater significance, is the parallel repetition of a form of statement claiming that no-one had been able to control his physical strength:

οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο αὐτὸν δῆσαι	(5:3)
οὐδεὶς ἴσχυεν αὐτὸν δαμάσαι	(5:5)

The force of the repetition is to emphasise, on the one hand, the man’s strength, and on the other, the failure of all human efforts to control him. As it transpires in the story, Jesus is able to control the man without the use of physical restraint, because Jesus recognises that what really binds the man is the ‘unclean spirit.’

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<sup>40</sup> Alexander, “Demonology,” 334.

<sup>41</sup> N. Joseph Torchia, “Eschatological Elements in Jesus’ Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac: An Exegesis of Mk 5:1–20,” *IBS* 23 (2001): 10.

<sup>42</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 249.

The repetition of the term ‘bind’ (δῆσαι, δεδέσθαι) together with the term ‘strong’ (ἰσχυεῖν) recalls Jesus’ reference to ‘binding the strong man’ (3:27); this connection, too, will be explored in the next chapter. The man we meet in 5:1-20 had been bound many times with chains (ἄλυσις) and shackles (πέδη) attached to the feet. Binding a person with chains and fetters was a commonly used method of constraining prisoners, slaves (Joseph in Ps 105:17,18) and vanquished rulers (Ps 149:8; Samson in Judges 16:21; Zedekiah in 2 Ki 25:7; Manasseh in 2 Chron 33:11; Jehoiakim in 2 Chron 36:6). Such measures had in this case been ineffectual (5:3b)—the man had broken free on account of his great strength. His destruction of these chains and shackles recalls the strength of Samson in tearing apart his bindings: in LXX Judges 16:9 the same verb διασπάω (tear apart, tear in pieces) is used as in Mark 5:4. This connection suggests a supernatural strength, for Samson’s power is attributed to YHWH.<sup>43</sup>

## Nakedness

The subsequent narrative mentions that the man, after the exorcism, is found clothed (5:15). This detail implies that in his previous state he was unclothed (a point that Luke 8:27 makes explicit) yet few commentators have noted the significance of the man’s nakedness. Clothing is a strong indicator of personal identity and social status in the ancient world.<sup>44</sup> Augustine Stock notes that in the texts of antiquity one’s clothes are not merely utilitarian but symbolic: they evoke, extend and express the person, and function as an important element in one’s self-communication. Stock thus comments that in his nakedness the demoniac is ‘without personal identity’,<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14; 16:28. Other examples of supernatural strength expressed as ‘binding’ occur in Luke 13:16 (Satan had bound a sick woman) and in Acts 20:22 (Paul is bound by the Spirit).

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Mt 22:11-12. See further Berger, *Identity*, 40–43.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 49, 168.



by which he may mean that whatever social status the man had is now lost, and his identity is disordered, confused and undefined. Mark gives special attention to significant aspects of clothing at many points: John the Baptist's garb recalls that of Elijah (1:6); for the woman with the haemorrhage, Jesus' clothes become an extension of his person (5:28-30); Jesus' garments become radiantly white in his transfiguration (9:3); he is dressed in purple by the Roman soldiers (15:17-20); the young man at Jesus' tomb is dressed in a white robe (16:5). But to be without clothes in public, as was Jesus on the cross (15:24), is the height of degradation and shame. While Pheme Perkins' summary of the demoniac's condition is overstated ('The demons have stripped this man of every shred of humanity'),<sup>46</sup> it is clear that the humanity he exhibits is diminished and distorted.

### **'On the mountains'**

Mark notes that the present activities of the man are done 'among the tombs and on the mountains' (5:5). Some commentators point out the symbolism of the mountain as an *axis mundi* or architectonic centre.<sup>47</sup> Malbon states that 'the mountain as a topographical location is rich with significance from the Jewish Scriptures.'<sup>48</sup> In Matthew's Gospel mountains seem to have marked significance: five crucial events occur on mountains.<sup>49</sup> In Mark's Gospel only one of these events (the transfiguration scene) is set on a mountain, but the appointing of the Twelve also happens on a mountain (3:13, not in Matthew) and Mark has Jesus praying on a mountain (6:46,

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<sup>46</sup> Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel of Mark: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 583.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 112, 117.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 89.

<sup>49</sup> See K.C. Hanson, "Transformed on the Mountain: Ritual Analysis and the Gospel of Matthew," *Semeia* 67 (1994): 147-77.

as in Matthew 14:23).<sup>50</sup> Thus, for both of these Gospel writers, mountains appear to have some symbolic significance. However, in the Gerasene demoniac story the mountains seem to signify places that are isolated from inhabited and cultivated areas (cf. ἔρημος in Mark 1:12, 13).<sup>51</sup>

### Intertextual echoes

At this point it is convenient to consider various suggestions as to possible associations of the man's description in Mark 5:3-5 with OT texts. Many scholars believe that these verses, which give vivid details about the man's background, are an interpolation, added to the original form of the story by pre-Markan shapers of the tradition.<sup>52</sup> However, conjectures on the possibility of a separate source are not germane to the present study, so I will focus on the question of the significance of the man's description as it is presented in the text as it stands.<sup>53</sup> We do not know, of course, whether Mark or anyone else involved in the production of Mark 5 has purposefully made reference to Hebrew or LXX texts. Yet, because the 'echoes' have been recognised by modern scholars, it is probably correct to assume that they would also have been recognised by Mark's original audience. So it is right to ask

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<sup>50</sup> Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar: A Study in the Making of the Marcan Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1952), 6–9, thinks these three mountains are significant for the structure of Mark's Gospel.

<sup>51</sup> Matthew's version (Mt 8:28-34) makes no mention of mountains—they are merely places for pasturing animals, as in Matthew 18:12. In the light of the associations suggested by Gospel mountains, Malbon may be right when she detects a parallel with the biblical account of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22): the demoniac, like Isaac, is rescued from the threat of death by the provision of a substitutionary death of animals on the mountain, which serves as 'an archetypical location for divine rescue or healing.' (Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 84–5). However, 'mountains' is plural here, and the exorcism itself occurs at the seaside.

<sup>52</sup> Craghan, "Gerasene Demoniac," 528; Pesch, "Markan Version," 372. Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8*, 273, gives a brief review.

<sup>53</sup> For an excellent example of a source-critical investigation of Mark 5:1-20, see Jostein Ådna, "The Encounter of Jesus with the Gerasene Demoniac," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 279–301.



what bearing they may have on the interpretation of the Gerasene demoniac story. Two passages share with Mark 5:3-5 the phenomenon of ‘dwelling in tombs’:

(a) Scholars have recognised some parallels with LXX Ps 67:6 (MT 68:7):

ὁ θεὸς κατοικίζει μονοτρόπους ἐν οἴκῳ ἐξάγων πεπεδημένους ἐν ἀνδρείᾳ,  
ὁμοίως τοὺς παραπικραίνοντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐν τάφοις.

There are three reasons for seeing a possible influence of Ps 67 here. First, tomb-dwelling is mentioned in both. Mark’s phrase ὃς τὴν κατοίκησιν εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν (5:3) corresponds to the phrase τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐν τάφοις (LXX Ps 67:6).<sup>54</sup> Second, the participle πεπεδημένους corresponds to the noun πέδη in 5:4. The Psalm’s prisoners are bound in shackles, like the demoniac. Third, God’s activity in the psalm—settling the solitary in a house (κατοικίζει μονοτρόπους ἐν οἴκῳ), leading forth prisoners and tomb-dwellers—corresponds closely to the activity of Jesus for the (solitary) demoniac—releasing him from his bondage and sending him to his house and family (εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σοὺς, 5:19).<sup>55</sup>

If Mark’s original audience recognised LXX Ps 67:6 as a background text, the correspondence of Jesus’ activity in this story to God’s activity in the psalm may have helped to make a christological point: Jesus is doing God’s work of emancipation and rehabilitation for those who are desperately needy.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> BHS notes that the LXX substitution of ‘tombs’ for ‘desolate places’ (MT) may be a misreading of  $\text{מִן־הַמִּצְרִיִּם}$  for  $\text{מִן־הַמִּצְרִיִּם}$ .

<sup>55</sup> Compare J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Legend and Event: The Gerasene Demoniac: An Inquest Into History and Liturgical Projection,” in *Studia Biblica 1978: II. Papers on the Gospels*, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1980), 64: ‘[The verse] describes (as it were) Jesus’ act: the saved are sent home to their families (one should not be a solitary), while the rest remain in a dry land suitable for tombs and caves. The “provoking ones” belong in such an ambience.’

<sup>56</sup> There are evident links to Psalms elsewhere in the Gospel, e.g., Ps 2:7 in Mk 1:11; Ps 46:1-3 in Mk 4:35-41; Ps 18:15 in Mk 4:39; etc. See also Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark’s Passion* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

(b) Scholars have recognised some parallels with LXX Isaiah 65:3-4.<sup>57</sup>

ὁ λαὸς οὗτος ὁ παροξύνων με ἐναντίον ἐμοῦ διὰ παντός, αὐτοὶ θυσιάζουσιν ἐν τοῖς κήποις καὶ θυμιῶσιν ἐπὶ ταῖς πλίνθοις **τοῖς δαιμονίοις**, ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν· καὶ ἐν **τοῖς μνήμασιν** καὶ ἐν τοῖς σπηλαίοις κοιμῶνται δι' ἐνύπνια, οἱ ἔσθοντες κρέα ὕεια καὶ ζωμὸν θυσιῶν, μεμολυμμένα πάντα τὰ σκεύη αὐτῶν·

There are several reasons for seeing a possible influence of these verses (and their context) on Mark's description of the demoniac. First, Mark uses the same phrase ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν (Isa 65:4; Mk 5:3). He uses the same word for 'tomb' (μνήμα) again in v. 5, although in v. 2 he had used the alternative μνημεῖον. Second, demons are mentioned in the Isaiah text, in the context of unholy worship (vv. 3, 11). Third, pigs are mentioned in both texts: pork-eaters (οἱ ἔσθοντες κρέα ὕεια, Isa 65:4)<sup>58</sup> imply pigs, and pigs (χοῖροι, Mk 5:11) imply pork-eaters. Fourth, both texts have the adverbial phrase διὰ παντός (the rebellious *continually* provoke God, Isa 65:3; the demoniac *continually* cries out and cuts himself, Mk 5:5). Fifth, taking into account the wider context of the Isaiah passage, mountains feature in both texts (ἐπὶ τῶν ὄρέων, the place where false worship takes place, Isa 65:7; τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἅγιόν μου ... καὶ κατοικήσουσιν ἐκεῖ, the mountain of God's holiness where the elect will dwell, Isa 65:9, 11; ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν, where the demoniac lived, Mk 5:5; πρὸς τῷ ὄρει, where the pigs were feeding, Mk 5:11).

The audience may well have recognised LXX Isaiah 65:3-4 as a background text, because these verses formed part of the Haftarah to the Torah Seder Exodus 15:22 in the synagogue readings.<sup>59</sup> The force of such a recognition would seem to lie in the text's castigation of unholy, 'unclean' practices. It provides a picture of rebellious people worshipping in ways that displease God. The rites mentioned seem

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<sup>57</sup> Isa 65:3-4. 'This is the people that provokes me continually in my presence; they offer sacrifices in gardens, and burn incense on bricks to demons, which exist not. They lie down to sleep in the tombs and in the caves for the sake of dreams, even they that eat swine's flesh, and the broth of their sacrifices: all their vessels are defiled.'

<sup>58</sup> C.H. Cave, "The Obedience of Unclean Spirits," *NTS* 10 (1964): 97, notes that Symmachus has χοῖρος.

<sup>59</sup> C.H. Cave, "Obedience," 96.



analogous to ancient Canaanite practices, particularly necromancy, in which contact with the dead was attempted through spending nights in cemeteries.<sup>60</sup> Idol worship is also referred to in Isaiah 65:11—cultic meals are offered to deities. In the Hebrew texts, these were the Syrian deities 𐤂𐤏 and 𐤂𐤏𐤂,<sup>61</sup> which, in the LXX, are rendered using δαιμόνιον and τύχη respectively. In the first century, according to Pliny, the personified Τύχη (Fortune) was universally recognised and worshipped; she has been described as the most important deity of the Hellenistic era.<sup>62</sup> The Isaiah text specifically identifies δαιμόνια as the objects of idolatry. In Mark's Gospel it is the δαιμόνια, sometimes called πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα (1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25) that are the objects of Jesus' exorcisms (1:34, 39; 3:15, 22; 6:13; 7:26; 9:38). Mark's audience at this point (5:3) thus knows that Mark has virtually equated the two expressions (more explicitly later in 6:7 cf. 6:13, and 7:25 cf. 7:26). It is, of course, not necessary to match up every detail in the two texts, for intertextuality works by suggestion and general association. For example, the δαιμόνια that are objects of worship in Isaiah 65:3 are stated to have no real existence (ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν)—they are imaginary deities. This contrasts with the assumption in the Gospels that the δαιμόνια are very real entities.

In short, the Isaiah passage colours the interpretation of Mark's story at this point by bringing to the picture already described (the man possessed by an 'unclean spirit', living amongst tombs) a remembrance of idolatrous practices (in which the man may have been involved), a state of general defilement that also involves pigs, and a feeling of God's negative judgement.

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<sup>60</sup> John D.W. Watts, *WBC, Vol. 25, Isaiah 34–66* (Waco: Word, 1989), 343.

<sup>61</sup> John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah*, 345.

<sup>62</sup> Luther H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (New York: OUP, 1987), 22. Martin quotes Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11, 5, 22.

### 3.3 The interaction: Jesus, the man and the demons (5:6-12)

The story is resumed at 5:6 after the extended description of the man (5:3-5). The man sees Jesus from a distance, runs to him and falls at his feet. The posture is that of eager obeisance—submission to one who is worthier and more powerful. Yet the man's words (5:7) do not show deference. There is a mismatch of word and action here, 'a curious and somewhat eerie mixture of avoidance and attraction'<sup>63</sup> that prompts the question: who is showing submission? A feasible explanation is that the action is the man's,<sup>64</sup> but the words are the demon's. Two considerations support this conclusion.

First, the narrator gives a reason for the man's outburst: it is a reply to the words Jesus has been speaking to him. Here it seems sensible to take the imperfect verb in ἔλεγεν γὰρ αὐτῷ (5:8a) as indicating that Jesus has been the first speaker, saying, even perhaps at a distance, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' (5:8b).<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that Jesus does not judge the man, in contrast to the Greek tendency to see madness as a form of divine judgement. In this speech Jesus addresses the spirit, and refers to the man in the third person. It is thus the spirit who is expected to answer, and so the reader is led to recognise the outburst as originating from the demon, not the man.

The second consideration is that in Mark's Gospel healings happen on account of faith.<sup>66</sup> In the subsequent pericope, Jairus sees Jesus and falls at his feet

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<sup>63</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 350.

<sup>64</sup> Marcus (*Mark 1-8*, 350) insightfully asks, 'Is the demoniac's approach and obeisance an indication that, at some level, the lost human being trapped inside the destructive forces is still aware of his plight and wants to be liberated?'

<sup>65</sup> This reversal of order in the narrative is sometimes seen as Mark's clumsy attempt to bring coherence to a traditional narrative. However, it is better taken as 'explicit commentary' for the purpose of explanation. The same construction (ἔλεγεν γάρ) is used in 5:28 in order to explain an action. Moloney (*Gospel of Mark*, 103) regards it as 'an elegant analepsis.'

<sup>66</sup> See C.D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989).



(5:22); the outcome depends on ‘believing’ (5:36). Similarly, the leper in 1:40 falls at Jesus’ feet and expresses faith and is healed. It is reasonable to see the demoniac’s similar approach to Jesus in the present pericope as a genuine action of the man, expressing some degree of faith.

However, the situation also recalls 3:11, in which evil spirits, when they see Jesus, fall down before him and cry out, naming him Son of God. It is clear that in this Gospel both men and demons recognise the supremacy of Jesus; in the present case both share the same body, and therefore share in the same action. In any case, whether we attribute the action primarily to the man or to the spirits, ‘seeing Jesus’ (5:6) is the kind of sight that recognises Jesus’ true identity, which the demon immediately verbalises.

The demon’s outburst runs thus: Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; ὀρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μὴ με βασανίσῃς. These words parallel those spoken by the demoniac in 1:23-28. Both men cry out loudly (κράζειν); both use the expression Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί; both identify Jesus with a title; and both express fear of torment or destruction. There is an additional element here, however—an adjuration. I will briefly consider each of these elements in turn.

The use of κράζειν is significant, because Mark seems to use it (12 times in the Gospel) in situations where christology is in focus.<sup>67</sup> Demons, disciples, crowds and people in need all cry out in differing responses to Jesus.<sup>68</sup> Previous to this story, only demons have ‘cried out’ (1:23; 3:11), and each time the cry has identified and named Jesus.

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<sup>67</sup> Edwin K. Broadhead, “A Linguistic Constellation in the Gospel of Mark,” *Australian Biblical Review* 47 (1999): 70–72.

<sup>68</sup> Demons—1:23; 3:11; 5:5,7; 9:26; disciples—6:49; people in need—9:24; 10:47,48; crowds—11:9; 15:13,14. When words other than κράζειν are used for crying out (1:3,26; 15:37), the christological connection is absent. Mk 5:5 is an exception to this pattern. There seem to be no significant LXX parallels; only 2 Sam 19:4 uses a similar expression, ἔκραξεν ... φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, for David’s lament over Absalom.

The expression *Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί* means ‘What have we in common?’ or ‘What business do we have with each other?’<sup>69</sup> It immediately puts the two parties in opposition to each other—it is a drawing up of battle lines. The reader knows that Jesus is in a situation of conflict with evil.

The demon of the first exorcism, in Capernaum, had identified Jesus as *ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ* (1:24). The generalised response of demons in 3:11 has named Jesus as *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*. Now in 5:7 Jesus is recognised as *υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου*. These titles, all of them in accord with 1:1, have become successively more specific. Mark’s use of them in the mouths of demons may be a deliberate use of irony, for the demons belong to the supernatural sphere, and thus have access to truths that the characters in the narrative do not know.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to many who see and hear Jesus yet do not understand (notably the scribes, 3:22) the demons know exactly who Jesus is. In this story the title ‘Son of the Most High God’ is certainly an acknowledgement of Jesus’ superior authority, signalled already by the man’s falling before him.

This authority is the basis of the demon’s fear of ‘torment,’ evidenced by the cry *μὴ με βασανίσῃς*! Jesus has commanded the unclean spirit to come out, and it is terrified by the prospect. It is possible that the demon is dreading its immediate expulsion from its geographical territory (5:10).<sup>71</sup> However, for a few reasons, it seems better to interpret this fear as an expectation of eschatological judgement. First, the demon in the Capernaum exorcism, speaking as a representative of a collective of demons, fears that Jesus has come to destroy them (1:24).<sup>72</sup> Second,

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<sup>69</sup> Arthur H. Maynard, “TI EMOI KAI SOI,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 582–86. The expression is derived from the Hebrew *לָמָּה לִּי וְלָהֶם* and is used 8 times in LXX, but it also made its way into colloquial Greek; it could serve as a protest against hostile measures (BAGD, s.v. *ἐγώ*). Apart from John 2:4, only Mark 1:24 and 5:7 (and their parallels in Matthew and Luke) use the expression.

<sup>70</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 103 Cf. Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, 103–06, 137.

<sup>71</sup> So France, *Gospel*, 228–9. Marcus (*Mark 1–8*, 344) notes that Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 4:25) provides a striking parallel in which a demon begs an exorcist not to torment it (*μὴ βασανίζειν*).

<sup>72</sup> See Marcus (*Mark 1–8*, 192–3) for a brief discussion of eschatological language in Mk 1:23–26.



βασανίζειν is used also in Revelation 20:10 for the eschatological torment of the devil.<sup>73</sup> Third, in Matthew's parallel to the Gerasene demoniac story we find an explicit eschatological interpretation: he adds the words πρὸ καιροῦ ('Have you come here to torment us *before the time*? Mt 8:29). These three texts demonstrate that there was an expectation that the activity of evil spirits would be temporally limited, and would come to an abrupt end in the eschaton. This time of judgement on evil is variously designated in other widely-known texts as 'that day' in which the Lord 'will remove the unclean spirit from the land' (Zech 13:2); 'the day of the great conclusion, [when] the new age is consummated, [when] everything is concluded upon the Watchers and the wicked ones' (1 Enoch 16:1); 'the determined end,' 'the Renewal' or 'the visitation' (פְּקֻדָּה, 1QS 4:11, 19, 26).

Many scholars have noted that the adjuration ὁρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν uses a formula that sounds as if the demon is attempting to exorcise Jesus, since expressions using ὁρκίζω in this way are well attested in PGM as exorcistic formulae. However, such an attempt would not cohere with the demon's ready acknowledgement of the supremacy of Jesus and of the expectation of expulsion, and so it seems better to take the words, as Lane does, as 'a violent invocation of God to strengthen the plea that Jesus would not torment him.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. 1 Enoch 69:28—'Those who have led the world astray shall be bound with chains, and their ruinous congregation shall be imprisoned; all their deeds shall vanish from before the face of the earth.'

<sup>74</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 184.

## Naming the demons

Jesus' request for the name of the demon shows that he is acting in accordance with the well-established customs of exorcists, for eliciting the name of the demon is an important aspect of the demonstration of power over it.<sup>75</sup> The demon's response, Λεγιών ὄνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοί ἐσμεν, is the first hint in this story of a plurality of demons. Scholars differ over the significance of the name 'Legion'. The explanation of the name is given already by the demons: the words 'for we are many' provide a numerical focus, with λεγιών denoting merely a large number.<sup>76</sup> In 5:15 the word is repeated, not as a name but as a collective noun, again denoting a multitude. Similarly, the term is used in Matthew 26:53 ('legions of angels') with the connotation of power as well as of number. Military images of angels are familiar already from such passages as Joshua 5:14 (the commander of Yahweh's army [צבא]) and 1 Kings 22:19 ('all the host of heaven'). The idea of a demonic military hierarchy finds expression in 1 Enoch's list of fallen angels: 'These are the chiefs of their angels, their names, their chiefs of one hundred, their chiefs over fifties, and their chiefs over tens' (1 Enoch 69:3).

However, the fact that λεγιών is a Roman military term means that we cannot ignore the possibility of a more or less direct reference to the Roman occupation.<sup>77</sup> Derrett has drawn attention to the use in the passage of other terms that have military connotations.<sup>78</sup> It is also often noted that the 10th Roman legion, stationed in Palestine since 6 CE, used the wild boar as its standard insignia.<sup>79</sup> Witherington

<sup>75</sup> E.g., T. Sol. 2:1 and PGM 4:3037-39.

<sup>76</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8*, 281; Gundry, *Mark*, 260; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 103.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Dormandy, "The Expulsion of Legion: A Political Reading of Mark 5-1-20," *ExpT* 111 (2000): 335-37; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 101.

<sup>78</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac," *JSNT* 3 (1979): 5.

<sup>79</sup> Torchia, "Eschatological Elements," 19. Markus Lau, "Die *Legio X Fretensis* und der Besessene von Gerasa: Anmerkungen zur Zahlenangabe 'ungefähr Zweitausend' (Mk 5:13)," *Biblica* 88 (2007): 351-64, notes that although Roman legions consisted of about 5000-6000 soldiers, in 66 CE a *vexillatio* of the 10th legion consisting of 2000 soldiers was involved in fights with Jewish insurgents. In addition, Josephus mentions that 2000 Roman troops were killed by Jews (Josephus, *Bell.* 2:499-



acknowledges the military language, yet maintains, rightly, that the primary reference is not to the Roman occupation.<sup>80</sup> Kazen suggests that the story may at some stage have served as a satire on the Roman presence,<sup>81</sup> but that is not its function for Mark. The focus of Jesus' activity here is on the revelation of his power against the demons; these are the real enemy, however much the Roman legions are to be deplored.<sup>82</sup> As Perkins insightfully notes, the story compares the demons to the Romans, and not *vice versa*.<sup>83</sup> Like the Romans in the land, the demons have overpowered and taken possession of the demoniac, who has become 'occupied territory.'<sup>84</sup> The 'military language' is not out of place in a contest that has already been flagged as an assault on Satan's strongholds (3:23-27).<sup>85</sup> It seems to me that, while there may well have been those in Mark's audience who recognised Roman connotations, there is nothing in the text that would have compelled them to give 'legion' a political interpretation.<sup>86</sup> In fact, Mark is aware that Jesus' concept of governance transcends nationalistic politics.

### **The demons' entreaties**

After the demons reveal their 'name,' two further speeches follow, in which the demons present earnest requests to Jesus:

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506). Lau says that these facts may well explain the figure 2000 as the number of pigs. However, Josephus makes it clear that the army in question was a large (12,000 strong) composite one. Moreover, Kabul, the city devastated by it, was much closer to the sea than to the lake.

<sup>80</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 182–3.

<sup>81</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 334.

<sup>82</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 196.

<sup>83</sup> Perkins, "Gospel of Mark," 584.

<sup>84</sup> Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 249.

<sup>85</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, NIBC (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), 85. Also Berger, *Identity*, 49–51.

<sup>86</sup> In *T. of Sol.* 11:5 a demon refers to 'the legion of demons under me'. This is most probably dependent on Mk 5:9, but the expression indicates that the word was interpreted using the symbolism of military hierarchical order. Some interpreters make a much too facile identification of 'legion' with the Roman army, e.g., Horsley, *Hearing*, 140–42.

(5:10) and he kept begging (παρεκάλει) him eagerly that he not send them out of the region.

(5:12) and they begged (παρεκάλεσαν) him, saying, ‘send us into the pigs, that we may enter them.’

The first of these entreaties is reported indirectly, the second directly. Between these speeches Mark tells us that a large herd of pigs is grazing there on the hillside. There are apparent anomalies of number and gender in these speeches. It is possible to interpret the former (indirect speech), which has a singular verb, by assuming a distinct separation of identity between the man and the demons, so that the man is pleading on behalf of the demons, as if he knows he has a plurality of demons and wants to keep them close at hand. Although it is not possible to determine the extent of demonic control of the demons over the man’s consciousness, we do have instances in Mark’s Gospel where power to make humans act against their will is attributed to unclean spirits. See, for example, 1:26, where the unclean spirit shakes the demoniac and screams, and 9:18, 26, where the spirit throws the demon-possessed boy to the ground. In both cases the demon apparently uses the demoniac’s vocal apparatus, as is the case here in 5:9 (‘we are many’). The evidence thus suggests that the begging in this passage is not the man’s, but the demons’.

The use of the singular verb (παρεκάλει, 5:10) parallels that in 5:9 (λέγει), and reflects the fact that, from the observers’ perspective, the words come from the (singular) mouth of the man. For the narrator and the audience, however, there is a growing awareness, stimulated by the phrase ‘we are many’ in 5:9, that more than one demon is involved here. There has already in 1:23 been an indication of a plurality of demons (‘we’ and ‘us’); this was more likely one demon speaking for the demonic ‘community’. In the present story the first use of a plural form to refer to the demons comes in 5:10b—the neuter plural pronoun αὐτὰ. Their plurality is fully expressed in 5:12 and 13, where the verbs are plural and there is no possibility of



confusion of identity.<sup>87</sup> Jean Starobinski notes that this progressive pluralisation constitutes, together with the naming of the ‘legion’, a verbal process that objectifies and ‘exteriorises’ the demons; their fall into the sea simply completes the movement of exteriorisation.<sup>88</sup>

Regarding the anomalous use of masculine forms, it is not really a problem that Jesus, in asking for the name of the demon, addresses the man (αὐτόν, 5:9), for an exorcist will assume that a spirit will speak through its host. However, in the demons’ reply, the adjective πολλοί (5:9) is masculine, and in 5:12 the narrator uses the masculine λέγοντες referring to the demons’ entreaty. Mark does the same thing in 3:11, where again λέγοντες refers to the demons’ speech, and in 9:20 and 26, where the participles referring to the demon are masculine. Also, in the present passage, the ‘legion’ is termed τὸν λεγιῶνα (a masculine article with a feminine noun). Gundry, I think rightly, takes these forms as Mark’s accommodation to the host’s being masculine.<sup>89</sup>

Derrett believes that the language of ‘entering’ (ἵνα εἰς αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν, 5:12) constitutes a reference to bestiality, and that the demoniac actually attempts to enter the pigs sexually, causing panic among them.<sup>90</sup> However, this conjecture ignores the order of events in the narrative: the separation of the man and the unclean spirits occurs *before* the latter enter the pigs (5:13), and the man is not involved.

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<sup>87</sup> Mark uses παρακαλεῖν nine times in the Gospel—Mark 1:40; 5:10, 12, 17, 18; 5:23; 6:56; 7:32; 8:22. Jesus is always the object, and the entreaty is always, except in the present pericope, a request for healing. Here, in 5:1-20, the word is used four times: twice of the demoniac (10, 12), once of the people of the region (17) and once of the healed demoniac (18).

<sup>88</sup> Jean Starobinski, “An Essay in Literary Analysis—Mark 5:1-20,” *Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971): 389.

<sup>89</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 261. Luke’s version of the story (Lk 8:26-39) avoids these anomalies.

<sup>90</sup> Derrett, “Legend,” 69.

### 3.4 The departure of the demons (5:13)

The demons, in a virtual admission of defeat,<sup>91</sup> present Jesus with a double request: to be allowed to stay in the region, but in the bodies of the pigs. They know they will not be allowed to stay in the man, and perhaps view the pigs as a better option than destruction (cf. 1:24) or other possible places of banishment. Jesus allows their entrance into the pigs, but the subsequent destruction of the pigs demonstrates that Jesus has not allowed the demons to stay in the region. In drowning, they meet the fate from which the disciples were rescued in the previous pericope.<sup>92</sup> The displacement of the demons from the man to the pigs is Mark's only example of the widely attested *epipompe*, in which demons are banished to new abodes, including animals.<sup>93</sup>

In the drowning of the pigs some readers may perceive echoes of the familiar narrative that depicts the destruction of the Egyptian pursuers in the sea (Exodus 14:1-15:22).<sup>94</sup> Jesus, like Moses, demonstrates divine power in liberating his people from bondage. A similar scenario exists in the Genesis Flood narrative, especially as interpreted in 1 Enoch (e.g., 67:1-13, where the Flood is seen as judgement and punishment for the perverse angels); common to these two scenarios is the conception of the depths of the sea as the place farthest from God's presence.

For the number of pigs, Derrett gives a rather far-fetched suggestion based on an *'al tiqrei* reading that revocalises the Hebrew text of Psalm 8:7.<sup>95</sup> Although a

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<sup>91</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 103.

<sup>92</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 145.

<sup>93</sup> Pesch, "Markan Version," 365-7; see also Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 75. 1 Enoch 18:12-16; 86:1; 88:1 and Revelation 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 20:1-3 mention the 'abyss' as the place of banishment and imprisonment of disobedient spirits.

<sup>94</sup> On this, see especially Derrett, "Contributions". Marcus (*Mark 1-8*, 349) points to several verbal parallels with the LXX at this point.

<sup>95</sup> Derrett, "Legend," 66, reads *'alaphim* (oxen) as *'alpayim* (2000); 'the Son of Man ... has all creatures [Ps 8:7, 'all sheep and oxen'] subordinated to him ... Jesus was entitled ... to exercise sovereign rights over cattle which are herded (as pigs are) to the limit of 2000.'



large number of pigs is not necessarily required for the narrative to make sense (for one man houses the full number of demons), the fact that the demons are able to terrify 2000 pigs seems effectively to prove that a very large number of demons is involved.<sup>96</sup>

Some commentators have viewed the drowning of the pigs as a convincing ‘proof’ of the success of the exorcism.<sup>97</sup> While the dramatic change in the demoniac’s state seems to be proof enough, the pigs’ demise clearly adds weight to the demonstration of Jesus’ victory over the unclean spirits. In the terms of Mark 3:27, Jesus has well and truly ‘plundered Satan’s house,’ for the demons are seen to be totally vanquished. For Mark’s purpose of portraying Jesus as an exorcist and wonder-worker, especially in this pericope where the story contains much more detail than the exorcism of 1:21-28, the complete destruction of the demons is a crucial element, and it is hard to imagine any other way to portray it. The pigs serve as convenient objects for the unclean spirits to attach themselves to, in order that they might be conveyed to their destruction.

But is it really destruction? According to the traditions discussed above, evil spirits are immortal until the consummation of the age to come (1 Enoch 16:1). In Mark’s eschatological framework, Jesus stands out clearly as both the herald of that age (in Mark’s terms, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) and the one in whom its manifestation has already begun. It is reasonable to conclude that, in the present story, Jesus’ great victory over such a host of evil spirits functions as an extremely strong foreshadowing of his eventual total subjugation of the whole order of the demonic. As Starobinski points out, Jesus’ victory in this episode is a provisional one because, despite the overcoming of supernatural adversaries in a particular case, human

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<sup>96</sup> Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 183, citing Jerome.

<sup>97</sup> Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 74, refers to parallels in Jewish and Hellenistic literature in which exorcists require proof of expulsion. For example, Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 4:20) recounts an incident in which the demon, after being driven out of a young man, topples a nearby statue.

opposition (as well as demonic oppression) persists, and other victories will be necessary.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.5 The response of the people (5:14-17)

The herdsmen have been witnesses of the destruction of the pigs. They run to announce in the town and the countryside what has happened, and people come to see (5:14). They find Jesus with the man, who is now described (5:15) as τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον. Marcus translates this term as ‘the one who had been demonised for so long’ because of the duration implied by the present participle.<sup>99</sup>

#### **Exhibit A: a sane man**

The text graphically applies three participial descriptors to the man who had ‘had the legion’ (5:15). Jesus has tamed the man. First, the man is sitting (καθήμενον), his calm posture contrasting with his previous wildness. Second, he is clothed (ἱματισμένον), implying that he had previously been naked. His clothing is visible evidence of a change in his state and status: he is no longer a shameful figure, but has regained a personal identity and a place in society.<sup>100</sup> Third, he is in his right mind (σωφρονοῦντα). In vivid contrast with his disturbed, even deranged state of mind while under the control of the demons, the man is now sane and rational. It is interesting to note the language used in other narratives of transformation by exorcism. Philostratus reports that a young man exorcised by Apollonius ‘returned to

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<sup>98</sup> Starobinski, “Essay,” 396.

<sup>99</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 346.

<sup>100</sup> See Berger, *Identity*, 42, for the sociopsychological role of clothing in antiquity and its use as a metaphor in the NT.



himself' (ἐπανήλθεν ἐς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ).<sup>101</sup> Josephus uses a similar phrase in his retelling of 1 Samuel 16—David drives out (ἐξέβαλεν, 6:211) the evil spirits and demons so that Saul is 'restored to himself' (καὶ ποιῶν ἑαυτοῦ γίνεσθαι τὸν Σαοῦλον).<sup>102</sup> This language recalls that used for the non-exorcistic transformation (from degradation to repentance) of the 'prodigal son' of Luke's Gospel, where the man is described as 'coming to himself' (εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐλθὼν, Lk 15:17). In each case there is an acknowledgement that the 'self' of the sufferer has been deformed, overshadowed, displaced or withdrawn, and that after the healing experience there is a restoration to a former integrity.<sup>103</sup>

### The people's fear

Observing the man, the people react in fear (ἐφοβήθησαν, 5:15). Their sense of dread develops as the witnesses (probably including Jesus' disciples)<sup>104</sup> testify again about what has happened to the man, and 'about the pigs' (5:16). It is the kind of fear that intuitively senses an unusual presence of power and trembles (cf. 4:41; 5:33; 6:20; 9:6; 16:8). They express their fear by pleading (παρακαλεῖν) for Jesus to leave their territory (5:17). Marcus points out that the reactions of the townspeople mirror those of the demons: they are drawn to Jesus (5:6, 14-15), but are afraid of him (5:7, 15) and plead to be left alone (5:7, 10, 17).<sup>105</sup> In the larger narrative, their reaction advances the theme of people's opposition to Jesus (2:6-7, 16, 24; 3:2, 6, 22) but this time, from the non-Jewish side.

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<sup>101</sup> Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 4:20.

<sup>102</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, 6:168.

<sup>103</sup> This invites comparison to Paul's concept of the transformed *nous* (Rom 8:5; 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16; 2 Cor 10:5; cf. Phil 2:2). See further Alexandra R. Brown, "Seized," 756; she writes, 'for Paul, the mind reflects the orientation of the whole self toward or away from God'.

<sup>104</sup> The disciples do not appear at all in 5:1-20; it is to be presumed that they observe the whole episode. This will be, for them, a demonstration lesson, for soon afterwards they themselves are 'casting out many demons' (6:13).

<sup>105</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 353.

There are various suggestions as to why the Gerasenes reject Jesus. Many commentators identify as the cause their financial loss from the destruction of so many pigs—they have probably been supplying the Roman troops with meat for food and animals for sacrifices. Earl Johnson suggests that Jesus' implicit critique of the Romans and their practices engenders resentment on the part of the people.<sup>106</sup> Paul Hollenbach suggests that the people are threatened by Jesus' dissolution of the stable social *status quo* that has maintained the demoniac in isolation.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, René Girard suggests that the relationship between the demoniac and the Gerasenes has been one of 'cyclical pathology'—a kind of symbiotic co-dependence that vanishes as Jesus expels their demons and upsets their balance.<sup>108</sup>

While there may be some value in these explanations, no reason is given in Mark's narrative for the people's request for Jesus to leave their territory. However, the motif of 'seeing' is present here (ἰδεῖν 5:14, θεωροῦσιν 5:15, ἰδόντες 5:16); their rejection of Jesus demonstrates that these people are blind to the reality and significance of God's activity revealed in this event. Nevertheless, Jesus accedes to their request, and begins to embark for the return sea journey.

### 3.6 The response of the man (5:18-20)

In contrast with the plea of the people for Jesus to depart, the man who had been demon-possessed makes at this point a positive plea: he begs Jesus (παρακαλεῖν again) to let him be 'with him' (5:18), that is, to be among the disciples (cf. 3:14).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Earl S. Jr. Johnson, "Mark 5:1–20: The Other Side," *IBS* 20 (1998): 69–71.

<sup>107</sup> Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study," *JAAR* 49 (1981): 567–88.

<sup>108</sup> René Girard, "The Demons of Gerasa," in *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, ed. Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 95.

<sup>109</sup> Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* 4:20 provides a parallel: a newly-exorcised young man leaves his former way of living and models his life on that of Apollonius.



This request may be an expression of gratitude, normally demonstrated in terms of obligation to a patron-client relationship.<sup>110</sup> Jesus does not, however, accede to the request. His message transcends the traditional and accepted notion of patronage. Instead, he frees the man from any sense of obligation, charging him to return to his own house and his own people, and to announce how much the Lord has done for him, and how He has had mercy on him (5:19).<sup>111</sup>

The return to home and family is another proof of the cure.<sup>112</sup> Jesus attributes the whole event to ὁ κύριος, that is, God (cf. 12:29; Lk 8:39, ὁ θεός). The man obeys, beginning to tell his story in the cities of the Decapolis, but he attributes his healing to *Jesus*. Mark here makes a clear christological (and rhetorical) point, unemphasised but unmistakable: Jesus is Lord.<sup>113</sup> While falling short of identifying Jesus with God, the author signals his understanding that ‘where Jesus acts, there God is acting.’<sup>114</sup> The healed man thus corroborates the demons’ recognition of Jesus as ‘Son of the Most High God’ (5:7). The whole story thus contributes to Mark’s developing emphasis on the identity of Jesus as the Son of God (1:1, 11, 24; 2:7, 10, 28; 3:11; 4:41).

In line with the almost formulaic refrain of 1:22, 27 and 2:12 (and in contrast to the response of the Gerasenes) the man’s proclamation in the Decapolis is

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<sup>110</sup> Dawson, *Freedom*, 161–62.

<sup>111</sup> Jesus’ interpretation of his ministry to the man in terms of mercy (5:19) implies that forgiveness is included in that ministry (cf. 2:1–12). The intertextual linkage of 5:3–5 recalls the sins of rebellion against God through offering unauthorised sacrifices and spurning ritual purity (Isaiah 65:3–4, 7, 11). Perhaps there is a hint here that the demoniac has been involved in idolatrous (perhaps Roman) practices. Jostein Ådna (“The Encounter of Jesus with the Gerasene Demoniac,” in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 301) notes that in documents of early Christianity ‘demon possession was predominantly related to paganism and the idolatry connected with it.’ It was seen as one of the possible consequences of idolatry.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Lk 8:27, where the demoniac is said to be not living in a house (ἐν οἰκίᾳ οὐκ ἔμενεν).

<sup>113</sup> The connection is to be made by the audience. Mark never uses κύριος unambiguously as a title of Jesus. Daryl D. Schmidt, *The Gospel of Mark*, The Scholars Bible (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990), 74, translates κύριος here as ‘patron’; in the light of my comment above about patronage, this translation is highly questionable.

<sup>114</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 354.

received with amazement. In this case there has been no prohibition of proclamation—no command to silence—and he has done more than Jesus has commanded. Although some commentators see an element of disobedience in the fact that the man is not said to ‘go home’ but rather proclaims in the Decapolis,<sup>115</sup> the text has no adversative  $\delta\epsilon$  here (cf. 1:45 and 7:36), and there seems to be no reason why his proclamation in the Decapolis should not include testimony to his family.

Many commentators note the significance of the man’s proclamation for the expansion of Jesus’ message into Gentile territory. The man has received a ‘commission to preach the word to the Gentiles’.<sup>116</sup> According to Joseph Torchia, ‘this incident provides a means of establishing a crucial beachhead for the Kingdom among non-Jews.’<sup>117</sup> In Marcus’s words, the story ‘symbolises a significant transition in Christian history’ because it tells of the first proclamation of the gospel on Gentile soil.<sup>118</sup> Jesus’ commission effectively removes the man from association with the Twelve, so that he evidences a kind of discipleship that will be more familiar in the experience of the post-resurrection audience.

### 3.7 Observations on the story as a whole

Having examined the elements of the story in its narrative sequence, I will now identify several significant aspects of the story as a whole. These include the expression of many of the ‘rhetorical facets’ discussed in the previous chapter, the ethnic identity of the demoniac, the eschatological implications of the story, its

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<sup>115</sup> E.g., Wrede (cited by Lane, *Mark*, 188) and Williams, *Other Followers*, 112, 126.

<sup>116</sup> Torchia, “Eschatological Elements,” 21.

<sup>117</sup> Torchia, “Eschatological Elements,” 3. Similarly, Hurtado, *Mark*, 83, sees this episode as ‘a foretaste of the mission of the church to the nations.’

<sup>118</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 353. For a consideration of the question as to why the so-called ‘messianic secret’ seems to be abrogated here, see the next chapter.



christological focus together with its highlighting of various perceptions of Jesus, its anthropological features, the theological interpretation of the episode, and the affective impact of the story.

### **The story is rhetorically crafted**

The ‘rhetorical facets’ outlined in the previous chapter are strongly in evidence in this pericope. First, the story advances the ‘rhetoric of the message’: despite the fact that ‘repentance’ and ‘faith’ are not explicit here, the episode is a startling exhibition of ‘good news’ for the audience, as Jesus’ power over a ‘legion’ of ‘unclean spirits’ is effectual for a radical life-giving transformation of the demoniac. Mark’s ‘rhetoric of demonstration’ is also clearly exemplified here: the man’s transformation is observed by the audience, who are able to identify with him in various ways. There is more to be said about this potential for identification below.

In terms of the ‘rhetoric of instruction’, in which transformation is urged rather than demonstrated, the story contains no direct address either to the disciples or to the audience. However, Jesus’ instruction to the demoniac to ‘go home and tell’ may well be appropriated by hearers who have also become followers, and, to the extent that Jesus’ deed here functions as a ‘teaching’ (*didachē*), the audience is very likely to discern that his venture into ‘unclean’ territory and his care for a particularly ‘unclean’ Gentile exemplify for them a new paradigm that challenges their view of social and religious boundaries.

Under the rubric of the ‘rhetoric of indirection’ I highlighted metaphor, irony, paradox, ambiguity and opacity. The rhetoric associated with the metaphor of blindness and deafness is not explicit (in those terms) in the story, but Jesus is both correctly and incorrectly perceived.<sup>119</sup> There is much irony in the narrative—more is

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<sup>119</sup> See below, pp. 145-6.

going on than meets the eye. The demons themselves ironically use the language of exorcism (5:7) in confronting Jesus. When the audience hears the statement that ‘no one was strong enough to subdue’ the demoniac (5:3, 4), their prior knowledge (about who Jesus is and about the kinds of things he does) leads them to expect that he will show himself to be the ‘stronger one’ and perform a successful exorcism. Because they already know the source of Jesus’ power, they do not share the terror of the townspeople who want Jesus to leave their area (5:17).<sup>120</sup>

Several elements of ambiguity and paradox are evident in the story. To whom does Jesus speak, and who drives whom, the man or the demon? And is the latter singular or plural? If these questions are perceived to be problematical, the audience must figure them out for themselves.<sup>121</sup> It is paradoxical that Jesus’ deliverance, bringing peace and sanity to the man, evokes terror in the townspeople! This scenario, paralleling the reaction of the disciples to the calming of the storm in the previous pericope, is also strongly ironic: the audience knows more about Jesus than either the townspeople or the disciples at this point in the story.<sup>122</sup> Again, Jesus does not allow the man, a would-be disciple, to be ‘with him’ (5:18-19). In each case the hearers are given an opportunity to clarify their own responses to Jesus.

In terms of the ‘rhetoric of performance’, there is limited exploitation of the dramatic power of the ‘historic present’ tense to increase the vividness of the action: λέγει (5:7, 9, 19), ἔρχονται (15) and θεωροῦσιν (15). There is a single use of Mark’s

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<sup>120</sup> Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, 135. Camery-Hoggatt claims (103-6) that the cries of the demons in 1:24, 3:11 and 5:7 are ironic affirmations, because they inform no one in the story, but the audience overhears. However, the response of the people in the synagogue (1:27) does not necessarily indicate that they are unaware of the demon’s cries, and popular reaction to the demons’ cries would not be appropriate in a summary (3:11), nor is it conceivable that Jesus would have utilised the witness of demons to further his case as Camery-Hoggatt suggests. Finally, the local people in 5:1-20 cannot be expected to show knowledge of Legion’s cries because they arrive on the scene later.

<sup>121</sup> The lack of clarity here is emphasised in a discussion by Geyer, *Fear*, 127-31.

<sup>122</sup> B. Dale Ellenburg, “A Review of Selected Narrative-Critical Conventions in Mark’s Use of Miracle Material,” *JETS* 38, no. 2 (1995): 173.



characteristic εὐθύς (5:2). The potentially considerable emotional impact of the story is considered below.

### **The story crosses ethnic and religious boundaries**

The pericope is an account of the transformation of a particular man. Is he a Jew or a Gentile, and is the question of his ethnicity important? One would expect that the responses of readers (i.e., the degree to which they identify with him or sympathise with him) might depend on their perception of him as either a Jew or a Gentile.

The story is set in ‘the country of the Gerasenes’. Gerasa, one of the cities of the group known as Decapolis on the eastern side of the lake, had been a centre of Greek culture after Alexander’s conquests, but had been acquired by the Maccabees in the first century BCE and then brought under Roman control.<sup>123</sup> Given this undoubtedly Gentile setting, commentators still differ over the question of whether the Gerasene demoniac is a Jew or a Gentile. I will present evidence for both possibilities, and then argue that the ethnic and cultural identity of the man is of lesser importance than his location and his strategic role in Mark’s narration of Jesus’ mission. First, some arguments for a Gentile identity:

- (a) There is no doubt that the Decapolis had a predominantly Gentile population in the first century, with a common Greco-Roman religious and cultural identity.<sup>124</sup>
- (b) The presence of pigs clearly identifies the region as non-Jewish.
- (c) The ‘dwelling amongst tombs’ and the echoes of Isaiah 65 in Mark’s description of the man implicate him in the pagan worship of δαιμόνια.

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<sup>123</sup> On the history and politics of Gerasa in relation to this pericope, see Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 44–45; Earl S. Jr. Johnson, “Other Side,” 58–60. For diverse traditions regarding the place name, see Tjitze Baarda, “Gadarenes, Gerasenes, Gergesenes and the ‘Diatessaron’ Traditions,” in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, ed. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 181–97; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus (Mk 1 - 8:26)*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1978), 201; Gundry, *Mark*, 256.

<sup>124</sup> S. Thomas Parker, “The Decapolis Reviewed,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 440.

(d) The designation of God as ὕψιστος (Most High) used by the demoniac in 5:7 is considered by many to be characteristic of Gentile usage,<sup>125</sup> and is certainly found in the magical-incantation literature.<sup>126</sup>

(e) The pattern of geographical markers (e.g., ‘the other side’) in Mark’s narrative seems to indicate a number of journeys into Gentile territory, whether or not these constitute a separate ‘Gentile mission’.<sup>127</sup>

(f) Jesus’ command to the man to ‘go and tell’ (5:19) argues for his being Gentile, for Jesus’ commands to silence are all given to Jews.<sup>128</sup>

There are, however, several arguments for an alternative, Jewish identity:

(a) To call the Gerasene region a pagan land is an oversimplification.<sup>129</sup> There was a significant Jewish minority in the region from 82 BCE, after its subjugation by Alexander Janneus.<sup>130</sup>

(b) The association with pigs does not disqualify a Jewish identity—compare the ‘prodigal son’ in Luke 15.<sup>131</sup> He may be a nominal, ‘lapsed’ Jew,<sup>132</sup> ‘corrupted and defiled through the presence of the Roman force.’<sup>133</sup> Watts implies that he thinks the herdsmen of the pigs were also lapsed Jews, and that the destruction of the pigs should be understood as an act of judgement analogous to the cursing of the fig

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<sup>125</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Spirit-Possession and the Gerasene Demoniac,” *Man* 14 (1979): 289; Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8*, 279. Hurtado, *Mark*, 82, summarises the usage: the term most often occurs in the LXX on the lips of Gentiles (e.g., Gen 14:18-22; Num 24:16) or in a Gentile context (e.g., Dan 4:21; 7:18, 22, 25, 27) or where the God of Israel is contrasted with the gods of other nations (e.g., Ps 96:9). However, see below for exceptions to this usage.

<sup>126</sup> Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 82.

<sup>127</sup> Eric K. Wefald, “The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms,” *JSNT* 60 (1995): 3–26; cf. Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>128</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 83.

<sup>129</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 166, note 152.

<sup>130</sup> Dormandy, “Expulsion,” 335. See Josephus, *Ant.* 13.391-4; *Bell.* 1:103-5.

<sup>131</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 164.

<sup>132</sup> Derrett, “Contributions,” 6, 13

<sup>133</sup> Dormandy, “Expulsion,” 335–6.



tree.<sup>134</sup> Although Derrett says that ἄνθρωπος in the Gospels always means a Jew,<sup>135</sup> Gundry disputes this on the basis that the term is a general one.<sup>136</sup>

(c) A consideration of the association with Isaiah 65 needs to take into account that that passage describes Jews, not Gentiles; it is addressed to ‘apostate and self-defiled Israel.’<sup>137</sup> Despite Paul’s use of Isaiah 65:1 as a reference to Gentiles (Rom 10:20), he acknowledges in the following verse (Rom 10:21) that the passage refers to Jews.

(d) The expression ὁ θεός τοῦ ὑψίστου, far from carrying a polytheistic pagan nuance, is also used for יְיָ in the Psalms, and could have been a current Jewish expression.<sup>138</sup> (e) If the demoniac is a Gentile, then a later healing story raises an inconsistency: Jesus is initially reluctant to heal the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24ff) because she is a Gentile. Since there is no such reluctance in the case of the demoniac, he must be Jewish.<sup>139</sup>

(f) Jesus’ agenda, according to Watts, is the restoration of Israel—the inauguration of a ‘new exodus’—and so the focus of his ministry is on his own people; Jesus ventures into non-Jewish territory to effect the deliverance of a ‘bound’ Diaspora Israelite.<sup>140</sup>

Watts concludes that, since there is no *direct* textual evidence for either position on the ethnicity of the demoniac, dogmatism is to be avoided.<sup>141</sup> I would agree, although I believe that the weight of evidence, especially the presence of Mark’s geographical markers, favours a Gentile identity. The presumption that ‘if

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<sup>134</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 165, note 145, also Derrett, ‘Contributions,’ 6.

<sup>135</sup> Derrett, ‘Contributions,’ 16, note 26.

<sup>136</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 257.

<sup>137</sup> Dormandy, ‘Expulsion,’ 336.

<sup>138</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 164; G. Bertram, in *Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. and trans., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967): VIII, 620. The term is used in LXX Ps 45:4; 56:2 and 78:35 in contexts that are decidedly Jewish.

<sup>139</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 165–6.

<sup>140</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 166.

<sup>141</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 166.

the demoniac is a Gentile, Mark would mention it as he does elsewhere'<sup>142</sup> neglects the fact that Mark is often not explicit about 'facts'. As Malbon points out, Mark uses 'signals' to alert his audience to changes in location; the signals for the Jewish homeland (Galilee and Judea) include references to Jewish centres of worship and encounters with Jewish religious leaders.<sup>143</sup> The terms 'cross over' (διέρχομαι, 4:35, cf. διαπεράω, 5:21; 6:53) and 'the other side' (τὸ πέραν, 4:35; 5:1; 5:21; 6:45, 8:13) function as narrative signals in the same way. Thus there is no need for Mark to be explicit about whether a character is a Jew or a Gentile.

Ultimately, the question of whether the man is a Jew or a Gentile is of comparatively little significance. What is more important is the *location* of the event. The sea crossings appear to be symbolic, with the eastern side symbolising Gentile (perhaps specifically Roman) social space.<sup>144</sup> Jesus has crossed a boundary into 'new symbolic territory'<sup>145</sup>—a foreign place whose 'foreignness' is more crucial than its precise location.<sup>146</sup> In my view, its 'foreignness' is also more crucial than the precise identity of the inhabitants. Mark's fairly clear, though implicit, distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish areas is there not so much for the purpose of maintaining the boundaries as for the purpose of showing that Jesus crosses them. Mark makes the Gentile *ambience* so strong that the man is fully implicated in it and inseparable from it. Mark also makes it clear that the story of the man's release from bondage is shared throughout the region, as the ex-demoniac proclaims it in the Decapolis. In Pimentel's words, the exorcism has shown 'God's mercy extending beyond the

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<sup>142</sup> Dormandy, "Expulsion," 335; also Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 165–6.

<sup>143</sup> Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 40.

<sup>144</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 189–91.

<sup>145</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 192.

<sup>146</sup> Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 41–43 This pericope narrates Jesus' first foray into Gentile territory, although in 3:7,8 there is a hint that Gentiles had been coming to *him*. Jesus enters Gentile territory again in 7:24–8:9.



community of faithful Israel to include also the unclean.<sup>147</sup> The story is thus inclusive of Gentile audiences; its message is for them as well.<sup>148</sup>

### The story has eschatological significance

The exorcism of demons is an event that evokes a cosmic perspective. An expectant audience will know that the activity of evil spirits will come to an abrupt end in the *eschaton*.<sup>149</sup> In this exorcism the eschatological judgement is already beginning. Jesus' words and actions are not only vanquishing evil powers, but also restoring the order of creation.<sup>150</sup> He is portrayed in the role of the hero,<sup>151</sup> as a conduit of divine power.<sup>152</sup> This display of eschatological power over evil and its effects is the major impact of the episode, and is the source of the witnesses' amazement and fear.

The use of θαυμάζω in 5:20 (the last word of the story) indicates amazement at the retelling of the story by the healed demoniac.<sup>153</sup> Mark signals the response he expects from his readers by frequently attributing wonder and amazement (which are responses to epiphany and revelation) to the audience in the narrative.<sup>154</sup> In this case the amazement is not explained, in contrast to other cases:

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<sup>147</sup> Peter Pimentel, "The 'Unclean Spirits' of St Mark's Gospel," *ExpT* 99 (1988): 175.

<sup>148</sup> If, as I have argued, the man is a Gentile, this is Jesus' first specifically recorded ministry to Gentiles, although it is possible that people from outside Israel were included in the ministry referred to in 3:7-12.

<sup>149</sup> Zech 13:2; 1 Enoch 16:1; 1QS 4.

<sup>150</sup> Dwyer, *Wonder*, 114.

<sup>151</sup> Starobinski, "Essay," 390

<sup>152</sup> Noting the presence of verbal and conceptual links with LXX Exodus 14:1-15:22 and related passages, Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 348-9) suggests that Jesus is cast here in a Moses-like role, in which he acts as a conduit of divine power. Derrett, "Contributions," 10-12 presents a case for the influence of Nahum 1 on the story as a whole. While there are some rather vague conceptual parallels, in my view the lack of verbal correspondences makes a strong relationship with Mark 5 improbable.

<sup>153</sup> Note that Mark uses a variety of words for this kind of response, e.g., θαμβέομαι (1:27); ἐχίστημι (2:12); ἐκπλήσσομαι (6:2; 7:37).

<sup>154</sup> See Dwyer, *Wonder*. Dwyer hesitates to state that Mark intended to evoke these feelings among his readers, but concludes (201) that 'Mark wants to present a record of the way in which the numinous excited wonder and awe in the breaking-in of the kingdom of God in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. If, however, the reactions of wonder indicate the power of the revelation of God in Jesus to unsettle and challenge human existence, certainly the gospel story as narrated by Mark would continue to unsettle and challenge human existence, as it has to this day.'

‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him!’ (1:27)

‘We have never seen anything like this!’ (2:12 )

‘Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom that has been given to him, and such deeds of power performed by his hands?’ (6:2)

‘He makes even the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!’ (7:37)

In each of these instances the amazement of witnesses denotes their perception that an entirely unexpected event has happened; Jesus has performed awesome deeds of a new kind, with a new level of authority. Confronted with the Gerasene exorcism account, the reader is led to make similar deductions: God has intervened; the kingdom of God has drawn near; it is time for a new vision of reality, a new world of possibilities opened up by the presence of the rule of God.

### **Christological elements are clearly evident**

Jesus himself is clearly the focal point of the story. His status is exalted, for he is named ‘son of the Most High’ (5:7); he is entreated (5:10,12) and obeyed (5:8,13,19-20). He commands (5:8,19), permits (5:13) and refuses permission (5:19). The narrator provides all the information we need to see clearly that Jesus is the superior one in the contest with evil. On the basis of the parable of the binding (δῆσαι) of the Strong Man (ἰσχυρός, 3:27) it is implied here that Jesus has bound Satan and his forces, and will ‘plunder his house’. This expectation is clearly suggested in the description of the demoniac: no one has been strong enough (ἴσχυεν, 5:4) to bind him (δῆσαι, 5:3). The power of unclean spirits is apparently greater than human power, but Jesus proves the stronger still, by a factor of 2000!

As noted above, in 5:3-4 there are possible christological implications of verbal correspondences to LXX Ps 67:6. That is, Jesus is doing God’s work of emancipation and rehabilitation for those who are desperately needy. Again, in 5:19-20 (where Jesus attributes the man’s healing to ‘the Lord, ὁ κύριός’ but the man



attributes his healing to Jesus) Mark seems to signal his understanding that where Jesus acts, there God is acting.

Noting the focus on Jesus in this pericope, Starobinski points out that the story incorporates a narrative technique that places the drama of the exorcism itself right at ‘the centre of the stage’: there is a ‘progressive isolation’ of Jesus.<sup>155</sup> He moves away from the crowd and the other boats (4:36) to be with the disciples, but when he meets the demoniac even these are not mentioned, as if the narrator is focusing on Jesus in single combat. After this there is a ‘progressive multiplication’ of the characters, as the herdsmen and then the townspeople arrive on the scene. The crowd on the Jewish side (5:21) completes the *inclusio*. This chiasmic feature, retained by both Matthew and Luke, is probably intrinsic to the tradition, and not due to any particular art on Mark’s part. However, it serves to help draw attention to the centrality of Jesus in the story. In my next chapter I will show how this story, which itself makes a powerful christological statement, is placed within a sequence of stories that progressively reveal how Jesus is to be perceived.

### **Jesus is perceived truly in the story**

The perception metaphor is a well-known feature of Mark’s Gospel. The theme is explicit in the quotation from Isaiah 6:9, in connection with Jesus’ parables. Those who are ‘outside’ see but do not perceive; they hear but do not understand (4:12). The language of seeing, hearing and understanding, together with blindness and deafness, pervades the Gospel. In this story there is both perception (on the part of the demons and of the man) and lack of perception (in those who ask Jesus to leave the district).

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<sup>155</sup> Starobinski, “Essay,” 386.

(a) First, the demons recognise Jesus and name him here as υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου. Compare this with 1:24 (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ) and 3:11 (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ). All of these are in accordance with Jesus' title in 1:1 (υἱὸς θεοῦ). Jesus is rightly perceived, in contrast to the misperceptions of the scribes, the Pharisees and the Herodians (2:6, 16, 24; 3:2, 6, 22).

(b) Second, the man perceives Jesus correctly. The verbal interchange that Jesus conducts is a dialogue between Jesus and the demons, but the approach of the man, I would argue, is the man's own action, despite his being under the influence of demons. He sees Jesus, runs up and bows down (προσκυνέω, 5:6) before him. This is a similar posture taken by another humble suppliant already in the Gospel: the leper kneels before Jesus (γονυπετέω, 1:40). So, later, does the rich man (γονυπετέω, 10:17). Similarly, Jairus 'falls at Jesus' feet' (πίπτει πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, 5:22). All these characters recognise Jesus as one who can fill their desperate needs.

### **Jesus is misperceived in the story**

An alternative response to Jesus is also clear. The people's observation of the transformed man leads to fear. The verbs of 'seeing' are prominent in this section: ἰδεῖν (the townspeople, 5:14), θεωροῦσιν (the people again, 5:15) and ἰδόντες (the witnesses of the exorcism, 5:16) but these people do not really 'see' who Jesus is. They are not able to identify him but, like the demons, they are afraid of him. After they hear the full story, they reject Jesus, and plead to be left alone. Although they have probably attributed extraordinary power to Jesus, they have misperceived him, for they are blind to the reality and significance of God's activity revealed in the exorcism. In the eyes of the audience, these people line up on the side of the Pharisees, the scribes, and Jesus' own family (3:21), who all make 'perception



errors.’<sup>156</sup> The audience is here given the opportunity similarly to reject Jesus, but the rhetorical pressure is to share the narrator’s positive perception of Jesus.

### **The anthropological focus is the transformation of the man**

Complementing Jesus’ central role in the story is the demoniac, who, because he is the primary human recipient of Jesus’ transformative power, shares the limelight in this drama. It is what Jesus *does* in the story that has profound implications for human transformation. The anthropological point is that Jesus transforms people. It is in the liberation of the demoniac that readers are able to make personal connections with the story.

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast between the man’s initial state and his state subsequent to the exorcism. The transformation is sharply defined, with no mention of any intermediate state—no indication, for example, of any loud cries or convulsions such as we find in the exorcisms of 1:26 and 9:26.

In the initial state he is wild, wailing, physically and ritually unclean, and presumably unclothed. The proliferation of detail in the description of this exorcism, compared with the earlier one (1:21-28),<sup>157</sup> the accumulation of ‘unclean’ elements and the extreme number of the demons all combine to signal here a ‘worst case scenario’. Demonic possession has destroyed the man’s integrity. He is not in control of himself. In his discussion of the difference between oppression by an exterior agent and possession by an interior agent, Sorensen notes that in the latter case:

one’s autonomy becomes compromised; the one possessed assumes the identity of the foreign spiritual presence, so as to become the agent of the foreign spirit’s will, or his or her own will is joined into allegiance with the possessing entity.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> This term is used by David F. Smith, “Can We Hear?” 206.

<sup>157</sup> See my discussion in the next chapter.

<sup>158</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 77.

This description well reflects first-century conceptions of possession. Philo and Josephus, for example, provide similar interpretations of Balaam's 'possession' by God's Spirit. Under prophetic inspiration Balaam lost the ability to control his own speech: he repeated, without understanding, words put into his mouth.<sup>159</sup> In such a state he was 'no longer his own master, but was overruled by the divine spirit.'<sup>160</sup>

Clearly, the Gerasene demoniac is portrayed as being overruled by the demonic spirits. His identity is entangled with those of the demons, as evidenced by the interchange of singular and plural modes of speech: 'My name is Legion, for we are many.'<sup>161</sup> His speech is uncontrolled, both in his constant 'crying out' and in his verbal interchange with Jesus. Neither can he control the demonic drive towards self-destruction. The description of his repeated acts of chain-snapping strength is clearly meant to convey the idea of intense supernatural power. This violence is like that of the evil spirit in Acts 19:16, who subdues (κατακυριεύσας) a group of exorcists and overpowers (ἰσχυσεν) them, leaving them naked and wounded.

His behaviour demonstrates a kind of independence and autonomy that is socially deviant. It is not clear whether this might have been attributed to madness or demon possession (the two are often associated and may be hard to distinguish; Jesus, in Mark's Gospel, is perceived both ways).<sup>162</sup> Whatever the cause, he has offended the purity codes of his society, and is externally and internally 'unclean'. As a result of all this, he is no longer a functioning member of the community. He has been repeatedly restrained by the community and excluded from society. Having broken free from these imposed restraints, he is now withdrawn from civilisation and inhabits deserted places.

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<sup>159</sup> Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1:274, 277, 283.

<sup>160</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 4:118. On the spirit of God as an 'invading angel' see John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First Century Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 27–55.

<sup>161</sup> See the insightful literary analysis of Starobinski, "Essay," 392–3.

<sup>162</sup> Ἐξέστη (3:21); Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει ... Πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει... (3:22, 31).



After the exorcism, it is evident that Jesus' action of expelling the demons has brought to an end their hold on the man. In his transformed state he is seated, clothed, in his right mind (σωφρονοῦντα, 5:15).<sup>163</sup> His liberated condition reveals him as a singular person whose integral humanness is no longer hidden, repressed or controlled. His identity as the demonic Legion has been dissolved; he has been effectively un-named and remade.<sup>164</sup> He has regained what ancient Greek philosophy regarded as the criteria of normative human status: rationality and sociability.<sup>165</sup> His drive towards self-destruction has been transferred to the pigs. His human speech is restored, so that he is able to proclaim his healing in a way that contrasts vividly with his previously uncontrolled shrieking. He has no desire to return to his previous state. On the contrary, his desire to follow Jesus is voluntary and spontaneous, demonstrating a restored will.<sup>166</sup>

The transformation is bound up also with relationship to the community—he is resocialised through Jesus' command to go home. His dysfunctionality is healed. From a state of 'living death' he has received new life. Jesus' intervention in the man's life has resulted in a radical reversal of his situation—a restoration that goes beyond what he had known before and that opens up to him a new way of life as a follower of Jesus.

In the light of what has come before, the outcome of the story is significant. The man ends up proclaiming a message about God in the Gentile Decapolis. This activity is similar to that of the leper (1:45) and of Jesus himself (1:15) and, later, of

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<sup>163</sup> The inward change is perhaps further implied by the underlying anthropology of 7:20-23, if the defilement of (at least some of) the 'evil things within' has been removed.

<sup>164</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 73.

<sup>165</sup> Christopher Gill, ed., *The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 8.

<sup>166</sup> Berger, *Identity*, 36, notes that the NT operates with a 'fundamentally different concept of freedom': 'the proper human freedom is not the right of self-determination but especially an attaching of oneself to a liberator, which means entering into a new sort of bond.'

the disciples. The man's proclamation actually precedes Jesus' sending out the disciples to preach, heal and cast out unclean spirits (6:7-13). It exemplifies and expands the theme of proclamation of the 'good news' throughout the Gospel. The content of the man's proclamation is 'how much Jesus had done *for him*'. He tells not only of Jesus the wonderworker, but also of his own personal experience. His life has been changed, and he himself is part of the message, proclaimed with the expectation that his audience can also be transformed.<sup>167</sup>

### **The theological interpretation of the story is given by Jesus himself**

Ὁ κύριός ἡλέησέν σε (5:19). This statement points to a divine-human transaction that is relational and personal: 'The Lord has done great things *for you*, the Lord has had mercy *on you*.'<sup>168</sup> It is also affective: the man has experienced real ontological change at a deep level—his life has been restructured.

### **The story has emotional impact**

There are many examples of what Fowler and Shiner call 'emotional markers'—clues for the oral reader about how to deliver the Gospel to an audience.<sup>169</sup> There is high drama in the Gerasene demoniac story, with a wide spectrum of emotions: violent, loud, manic behaviour (the man), torment (the demons cry out), fear (the people), calm (the man), wonder (other people) and several varieties of impassioned entreaty. Mark does not rely on intellectual persuasion; rather, he carries the audience along and *involves* them, inviting them to participate in the feelings of the characters. Readers are likely to feel the freedom, relief and peace of the man's return to sanity. The use of the word πάντες in the last phrase of the story (5:20)

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<sup>167</sup> McVann, "Dwelling," 159–60.

<sup>168</sup> See further below, pp. 242–3 on the role of God's mercy in transformation.

<sup>169</sup> Fowler, *Reader*, 122–3; Shiner, *Proclaiming*, 68–9. Neither Fowler nor Smith specifically treats 5:1–20. See, however, its treatment in Geyer, *Fear*.



signals a ‘reading-effect’ in which *everyone* is invited to marvel at the healed demoniac’s testimony.<sup>170</sup> The impact of the tale, then, is not just intellectual, but emotional/affective as well. One can even imagine applause (especially from the Jewish members of the audience) as they hear of the pigs drowning in the sea.

### **The audience can identify with the demoniac**

Chapter 2 raised the question of the audience’s identification with characters. There are at least five possible ways in which a reader may identify with the Gerasene demoniac.

#### *1. Oppression*

Readers may connect with the demoniac through his status as a victim. The sympathy of the reader would seem to be with the man, viewed as a victim of demonic possession and the kind of domination that hides his identity.<sup>171</sup> The extent of this domination is emphasised by the use of the word ‘legion,’ denoting an overpowering number, and the destructive nature of the demons is emphasised by their subsequent action in destroying the pigs.<sup>172</sup> Jesus has compassion on the victim and liberates him. While members of the audience may not have personal experience of demonic control, there will surely be amongst them some who view themselves as unhappy victims of social and political oppression. Some commentators attempt to explain the demoniac’s plight in terms of such societal pathology and violence.<sup>173</sup> For Girard, the demoniac is a ‘scapegoat’ upon whom the townspeople have

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<sup>170</sup> Similar uses of πάντες occur in 1:5; 13:37; 14:50, 64.

<sup>171</sup> Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 144, agrees. Bolt also notes that the man’s recognition of Jesus as ‘Son of the Most High’ also creates sympathy, since it sounds like the opinion of Jesus expressed by previous reliable commentary.

<sup>172</sup> Williams, *Other Followers*, 110

<sup>173</sup> Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs”; Girard, “Demons”; Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

projected their anger and hatred for the Romans. Although these theories are conjectural and demythologising, the reality of persecution for Jesus' followers looms large in the Gospel, and the tendency for Rome to 'scapegoat' Christians is famously attested.<sup>174</sup>

## 2. *Displacement*

The demoniac is out of place; his house and origin are elsewhere (5:19). This aspect may assist some in the audience to identify with him.<sup>175</sup>

## 3. *Faith*

Despite the displacement and oppression that is the Gerasene's lot, his actions seem to demonstrate that he trusts Jesus to meet his needs. In contrast with the disciples (at various points in the Gospel) and the onlookers, he is unafraid of Jesus, and even desires to be a disciple. Some of the audience will be likely to share these attitudes.

## 4. *Anonymity*

The demoniac, like so many of the characters who encounter Jesus in the Gospel, is unnamed. Moloney points out that anonymous characters invite readers into the story; their anonymity, which enables them to transcend the limitations of time, place and identity, opens the possibility that readers might discern commonalities with the unnamed characters, with the result that they are encouraged and challenged. As they hear the story of the demoniac, readers 'might recognise the occasions when powers larger than themselves seem to violently separate them from

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<sup>174</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

<sup>175</sup> Geyer, *Fear*, 127.



the way of Jesus'.<sup>176</sup> They might then seek for themselves Jesus' deliverance from bondage.

### 5. *Liminality*

In Mark McVann's analysis, the demoniac, in a 'liminal' situation (as an outcast) at the beginning of the story, experiences a transformation that puts him in a new situation of liminality.<sup>177</sup> He is in a process of change, at the threshold of a new life, on the boundary between states. Liminal situations put great strain on many aspects of personhood; they challenge one's loyalties, one's aspirations, even one's identity. The man's encounter with Jesus has brought real ontological change; he has passed from 'death' (in bondage to demons) to life (as a follower of Jesus). Many of Mark's audience may be Christian believers living in a similar kind of liminality, with the threat and danger of persecution. They may well see themselves in the character of the ex-demoniac.

## Conclusions

How, then, does the story contribute to Mark's narrative rhetoric? It will have made an impact on its first-century audience in a variety of ways.

First, the pericope illuminates the identity of Jesus, adding significantly to the picture presented earlier in the Gospel. He is a divine and powerful figure, and is perceived as such by both the demoniac and the unclean spirits. Mark's inclusion of the people's rejection of Jesus throws into stronger relief the more appropriate positive response of the demoniac. The audience is clearly expected to perceive Jesus in the same way, so as to agree that Jesus is, as Mark states, Son of God (1:1).

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<sup>176</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 186–91.

<sup>177</sup> McVann, "Dwelling," 147–53, 193, 231.

The audience is meant to accept this identification of Jesus and go on to become disciples, proclaiming Jesus as the demoniac does in the story.

Second, the pericope calls for an eschatological interpretation of Jesus' actions. For Mark, the whole episode—Jesus' victory over the demons, and the transformation of the demon-possessed man—is a demonstration of divine eschatological power and of the realisation of the rule of God. Mark expects his audience to be amazed at this revelation: the kingdom of God has indeed drawn near (1:15).

Third, the pericope focuses on the demoniac—the character whose transformation receives the most narrative attention in the Gospel as a whole. Mark has taken pains to make it exceptionally clear that this man has been radically changed as a result of his encounter with Jesus. His transformation is physical, emotional, rational, social and relational. He has transferred his allegiance from the oppressive demons to his exorcist, Jesus, whom he now follows and to whom he testifies.

How is the audience, then, to understand this transformation? Those who hear or read the story have been given the means, invested with the authority of the words and actions of Jesus, for evaluating not only the characters in the story—the demoniac and the onlookers—but their own lives as well. Through the use of emotion-laden language and graphic style, Mark has clearly but indirectly invited the audience to participate vicariously in the experience of the dramatic liberation of the demoniac. They are able to empathise, sympathise or identify with the demoniac as a sinner, as a victim of oppression, as a person in great need, as a humble suppliant before Jesus, as one who need not fear Jesus, as one who perceives Jesus rightly and responds positively to him, who receives the mercy of God that transcends ethnic and religious barriers, who desires to follow Jesus, and who proclaims Jesus. Moreover, they are able to recognise a negative response: the rejection of Jesus.



The rhetorical pressure on the audience, then, is to perceive Jesus rightly, to come to him as the demoniac did, to receive the mercy of God that Jesus mediates, and to go on to become disciples, proclaiming their liberation. The text has the potential of becoming, for those who ‘have ears to hear,’ a ‘revelation about the readers,’ enabling them to change.<sup>178</sup> Members of the audience may well have made personal applications along these lines: if this evil, demon-possessed man—an example of humanity in the worst possible state—can experience such radical change through Jesus’ power, then the possibility is open that any member of the ‘adulterous and sinful generation’ (8:38) may likewise be transformed. The characters in the story thus enable the opening up of ‘a new understanding of existence ... in which the limits of the world of ordinary living are transcended’.<sup>179</sup> The story constructs, for the audience, the possibility of an alternative present, together with an alternative future. A transformed worldview is available, with Jesus as its centre. This analysis, I believe, supports the use of the expression ‘transformative discourse’ for Mark’s Gospel.

This chapter has examined Mark 5:1-20 with minimal reference to its literary context. However, the story of the Gerasene demoniac does not stand alone; its connections to other passages in the Gospel must now be considered. These links will enable us to make further observations on the story’s contribution to Mark’s overall rhetorical thrust.

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<sup>178</sup> Tannehill, “Disciples,” 153.

<sup>179</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 287.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF MARK 5:1-20 TO MARK'S TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOURSE

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined in detail the story of the Gerasene demoniac and drew some conclusions regarding some of its rhetorical aspects. This present chapter will now explore the relationships of this story with other pericopae within the wider scope of the Gospel. How does this story contribute to Mark's discourse of transformation?

#### 4.1 Mark 5:1-20 in its narrative sequence

##### Intratextuality in Mark's Gospel<sup>1</sup>

Mark has placed the Gerasene demoniac story amongst many other episodes in the Gospel. Literary critics recognise that meaning lies not only in a text itself but also in the *placement* of that text, and in the interrelationships of that text to other texts. There may be connections backwards and forwards, and for hearers who recognise these connections, elements in the story can have significance beyond that of the story itself. In other words, texts may have one intrinsic meaning (even a complex and rich one) but many significances or applications, or one sense but many references. Readers or hearers may gain certain understandings that may be aspects

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'intratextuality' is complementary to the term 'intertextuality'; both are appropriately used by Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 1, to describe their approach.



of the story's *significance* for them, as distinct from the inherent meaning or central concern of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Stories may interpret one another. For example, Craig Evans shows how Markan 'sandwiches' facilitate the construction of meaning through both contrast and correspondence of elements in pairs of stories.<sup>3</sup> In each pair, 'the interpretive function is reciprocal'. This principle can also be applied to stories which are juxtaposed—for example, the stilling of the storm (Mark 4:35-41) and the exorcism of the Gerasene (5:1-20).

Discourse analysts rightly insist that any element of text will have its interpretation forcibly constrained by the preceding text, the immediately preceding text segment being the most important because of memory limitations. Thus the text can generate progressive expectations. For example, the audience expects that the promise of 1:17 ('Follow me and I will make you fishers of men') will be fulfilled. Of course, expectations can be reshaped or even set aside by subsequent text.<sup>4</sup>

A text may provide hermeneutical keys with which to guide interpretations of the material which follows. For example, the audience is told at the outset that Jesus is 'Son of God' (1:1); this knowledge will help to explain both his ability to do mighty works and his ongoing conflict with evil.

Verbal and conceptual connections between text segments invite associations. Whitney Shiner notes that, in Mark's characteristic intercalations, discrete episodes are interwoven to extend the narrative tension or to provide keys for interpretation. Likewise, associations are evoked by similar episode plots, presented at different places in the narrative to recall earlier episodes and to suggest

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<sup>2</sup> Goldingay, "How Far?" 9.

<sup>3</sup> Craig A. Evans, "How Mark Writes," in *The Written Gospel*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 135–48.

<sup>4</sup> Green, "Discourse Analysis," 183–4.

an underlying unity of theme or plot.<sup>5</sup> This dynamic is important in the Gerasene demoniac story, which illuminates previously narrated exorcisms and other ‘mighty deeds’. How does an audience perceive and appropriate these intratextual associations, links and significances?

### **Mark’s Gospel as a fugal composition**

On the one hand, the audience hears the story in sequence, diachronically. On the other, however, because of the characteristics of the narrative as a discourse—a conversation with the author—the audience, working on the meaning of the story as it progresses, hears the discourse in a way that is not necessarily linear. The perception and appropriation of this discourse will be dependent on the various degrees of receptivity of members of the audience. They will have ‘ears to hear’ at different levels. Some may be more interested in discipleship issues and their connections in the various episodes. Others may be sensitised to the presence of purity issues, and so on.

Dewey<sup>6</sup> and Malbon<sup>7</sup> point out the interwoven nature of elements of the discourse of Mark’s Gospel. Many themes are developed simultaneously. Themes are stated or foreshadowed, and are then intensified as they recur as echoes.<sup>8</sup> The Gospel’s concerns for issues of perception, purity and discipleship overlap and interweave, fading in and out of focus as the narrative progresses. As Malbon and Dewey have appropriately and helpfully pointed out, Mark has put together disparate

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<sup>5</sup> Whitney Taylor Shiner, “Creating Plot in Episodic Narratives: *The Life of Aesop* and the Gospel of Mark,” in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 155–76.

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Dewey, “Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecast and Echoes for a Listening Audience,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 221–36.

<sup>7</sup> Malbon, “Echoes.”

<sup>8</sup> I use the term ‘theme’ in its usual literary sense (i.e., topic or subject) rather than the specialised sense adopted by Iser (i.e., the perspective that a reader has at any one moment in the reading process).



and episodic material, not in discrete sequential units but rather as an interwoven and integrated non-linear composition, in a style which is characteristic of aural narrative.<sup>9</sup> The result is analogous to a tapestry or a fugue, which can only be fully appreciated by means of a synchronic analysis.<sup>10</sup>

The visual metaphor of tapestry seems more relevant for readers who have a written text in front of them. For hearers of the performed text, however, the auditory metaphor of the fugue seems to be more apt. It is unrealistic to assume that Mark's audience is hearing the Gospel for the first time. While this may often have been the case, it would probably have been subject to many re-readings. The benefits of hearing it a second time, or of having a written text that one can study, are manifold. The perspective of a second-time reader or hearer of an episode may be informed by material that is narratively subsequent to that episode; such 'sensitised' readers or hearers are familiar with what is to come, since they have read it or heard it before, whereas first-time audiences do not know as much. The full effect of Mark's reference to the cross in 8:34, for example, counts on his audience's knowledge of the coming crucifixion. However, retrospective awareness and a deepening of insight for first-time readers or hearers is also possible. Thus, in exploring the inter-connections of the episodes within the Gospel, movements both backwards and forwards are appropriate. Malbon's comment is insightful: 'Clearly the Marcan epistemology assumes that very little is clear immediately. Knowing is a process. Understanding is an echo.'<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that a more complete appreciation of the richness of the text (and, consequently, the subtleties of its rhetorical impact) can only be gained by a reading

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<sup>9</sup> Dewey, "Tapestry," 224.

<sup>10</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 111–17, presents a synchronic model that highlights Mark's 'bipartite symmetry'—the foreshadowings and recapitulations of the two interdependent 'halves' of the Gospel.

<sup>11</sup> Malbon, "Echoes," 230.

that takes into account the complexities of the ‘echoes and foreshadowings’ within the text. Although respect for the rhetorical dynamics of the Gospel would seem at first to necessitate a diachronic reading, the structure of the text is such that it resists diachronic analysis. Different views of the Gospel’s structure may rightly be honoured as valiant and valid attempts to make sense of the text as the audience hears it in the order of its ‘performed’ narrative sequence. However, it is not only more appropriate, but also more fruitful, to recognise that the work is ‘fugal’ in texture, and that different patterns and connections will be apparent to different listeners.

If Mark’s Gospel can be likened to a fugue, as I have suggested, then its opening can be likened to the ‘exposition’ of the fugue, where its various themes are presented for the first time. What we call the first chapter of the Gospel introduces many themes, such as the ‘good news’ of the kingdom of God (1:1, 14, 15), discipleship (1:16-20, 36), christological questions (1:1, 11, 27, 34), healing (1:30-34, 40-45), exorcism (1:21-28, 32-34), mission (1:38) and opposition (1:22, 27). All of these themes will reappear later in the Gospel, and most of them have relevance to the story of the Gerasene demoniac.

In fact, as I will show, Mark 5:1-20 is actually foreshadowed here, and the pericope can only be understood in the light of this ‘exposition’. Some of the stories in this initial section recount only the outlines of a kind of narrative that is elaborated in much greater detail in later incidents. For example, the story of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (1:29-31) is a short narrative segment that shares many features with the longer story of the healing of Jairus’s daughter (5:35-43): in both of these episodes Jesus takes a prostrate female by the hand and raises her (κρατήσας τῆς χειρός and ἐγείρειν are used in both 1:31 and 5:41). This strategy of



statement and expansion, seen again in the exorcism accounts of 1:21-28 and 5:1-20, can be seen to function as a means of releasing information gradually to the reader.<sup>12</sup>

From this point onwards in the chapter, I will investigate the contributions of Mark 5:1-20 to themes that are prominent in the overall rhetoric of the Gospel. In doing so, I will endeavour to take due account not only of the diachronicity of the narrative, considering the pericope in the light of what comes before and after it, but also of the ways in which the pericope contributes to the rhetorical force of the several themes that weave their way synchronically through the Gospel. Whereas my examination of the Gospel in Chapter 2 employed narrative rhetorical categories, in this chapter I will make use of thematic categories. First I will examine the part that the Gerasene demoniac pericope plays in developing what I call Mark's rhetoric of perception—his theme of 'seeing', 'hearing' and understanding. Then I will similarly consider Mark 5:1-20 in the light of Mark's rhetoric of purity, considering his use of the terms 'clean' and 'unclean', and the moral categories of good and evil. Third, I will consider the pericope's contribution to Mark's treatment of discipleship and proclamation, considering the demoniac as a follower of Jesus. Finally, after evaluating suggestions that the pericope has connotations of resurrection, I will draw some conclusions regarding the rhetorical significance of the story in the context of the Gospel as a whole.

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<sup>12</sup> LaHurd, "Reader Response," 155.

## 4.2 Mark 5:1-20 in Mark's rhetoric of perception

A major aspect of Mark's rhetoric has to do with the motif of understanding and non-understanding. As I showed in Chapter 2, this motif is often found in the guise of the extended metaphor of blindness and deafness. If the audience is sensitised to these motifs, they may well detect their presence in the Gerasene demoniac story. In my exegesis of the story I touched on these motifs. The question now is, How and to what extent does Mark 5:1-20 advance the author's concern that readers 'see', 'hear' and understand? What elements of 'the story so far' condition the effects of the episode on the audience, and what, if any, are its repercussions through the rest of the narrative?

### The perception motif in Mark 1-3

The first three chapters of the Gospel contain many prominent elements of the theme of perception. Mark announces his authorial view of Jesus' identity as Son of God in 1:1, and this is confirmed by the voice from heaven in 1:11. The demons are aware of who Jesus is (1:24, 34) and this knowledge will later be corroborated in 3:11 and 5:7. Jesus himself perceives hidden thoughts and attitudes (2:5, 8, 17). All this information provides the reader with a reliable base of knowledge against which to judge the perceptions and understandings of human characters in the story.

People perceive Jesus' authority as a teacher (1:22, 27) and as a healer (1:32, 40; 2:1-5), while Jesus reveals his eagerness that they might *know* additionally his ability to forgive sins. He also divulges his role as bridegroom (2:19)<sup>13</sup> and as 'lord

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<sup>13</sup> Although there is no evidence that 'bridegroom' was used of Messiah in pre-Christian Judaism, the figure may echo Isa 62:5, which identifies God as Israel's bridegroom in the future redemption. Jesus seems to indicate here that the messianic age has arrived. See further Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 236-37.



of the Sabbath' (2:28),<sup>14</sup> and an aspect of his purpose (1:38) that refers obliquely to his messiahship. Meanwhile, the scribes and Pharisees repeatedly respond to their observations of Jesus' activities with questions that reveal their lack of understanding (1:27; 2:6, 16, 18, 24). Having watched him heal (3:2), they begin to conspire against him (3:6). Both the scribes (3:22, 30) and Jesus' family (3:21) misperceive the cause of his unorthodoxy, ascribing it either to madness or demon possession. In a clever play on the words ἰδοὺ and ἴδε (32, 34) Jesus urges on his audience a radical change in their perception of 'mother and brothers'. In the first three chapters of the Gospel, then, perceptions of Jesus and his message are both positive and negative. The narrator provides many opportunities for the audience to perceive Jesus 'correctly', while showing that some characters in the story did not do so.

The Gerasene demoniac episode presents a similar picture. The relationship between this exorcism and the previously narrated one (1:21-28) will be examined in a later section. But here again (cf. 2:5, 8, 17) Jesus is shown to have perceived what was hidden: the man has an unclean spirit (5:8). And as before (1:24; 3:11) the demons perceive Jesus appropriately, here as 'Son of the Most High God' (5:7). Both the demoniac and his compatriots see Jesus (5:6, 14-16) and evaluate him and his works. The man responds positively, both before and after his healing, but the people respond with fear and suspicion (15-17). The author, of course, promotes the positive response, noting twice that Jesus has done 'great things' (19, 20).

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<sup>14</sup> 'Lord of the Sabbath' implies that Jesus sees his ministry as the eschatological renewal of God's original will in creation (Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 246).

### **The perception motif in the seed parables (4:1-34)**

Mark now introduces the important series of parables that focus the theme of perception in both scripture and experience. Jesus begins this series with the imperative ‘Listen!’ (4:3). Following his telling of the parable of the sower, the disciples question him (4:10), implying their lack of understanding (confirmed by Jesus’ question in 4:13) and providing the opportunity for an explanation, which, by effectively repeating the parable, helps its readers/hearers to remember it.<sup>15</sup> Jesus’ explanation notes that all four groups within the parable *hear* the word, but not all are fruitful. Thus he illustrates the axiom expressed in his quotation from Isaiah 6:9 (4:12), that those who see do not necessarily perceive, and those who hear do not necessarily understand. He makes it clear that, just as not all who have heard the parabolic word will understand it and respond fully and faithfully, so the disciples themselves have not understood the parable itself (4:13). Mark himself recognises this distinction and takes it up in his subsequent comment that Jesus ‘was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it’ (4:33). The focus on hearing in this passage is accentuated also by Jesus’ urgings, ‘If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear’ (4:9, 23) and ‘Take care what you listen to’ (4:24).

### **Mark 5:1-20 and the seed parables**

The Gerasene demoniac story clearly illustrates some aspects of the parable of the sower, which functions as a discourse on human flourishing. Here I acknowledge the insights of Mary Ann Tolbert, who argues compellingly that the parable ‘supplies the audience with the fundamental typology of hearing-response that organises the

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<sup>15</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing*, 165.



entire plot of the Gospel'.<sup>16</sup> Acceptance of this premise facilitates the categorisation of the responses of various characters according to the 'soils' of the parable. Immediately following the seed parables (beginning on the same narrative day and continuing until 5:43) three characters, including the Gerasene demoniac, seek healing and demonstrate faith (the fruitfulness of 'good soil') in contrast to certain other characters.<sup>17</sup>

In the parable of the sower 'the word' is presented to all, but there are four different responses to the hearing of it. It is widely recognised that the 'word' is the message Jesus himself speaks.<sup>18</sup> But this term cannot be limited to the spoken word, for, as many interpreters point out, in Mark's Gospel Jesus' teaching is identified with his actions: his word and his deeds are one.<sup>19</sup> Both proclaim the kingdom of God, and so responses to one are analogous to responses to the other. In the Gerasene story Jesus' 'performative word' accomplishes the exorcism. This prophetic word is 'sown' into the situation and is shown to be fully effective. There are two different responses.

The demoniac, seeing Jesus from afar and approaching him (5:6), demonstrates an eager and accurate perception of Jesus before the exorcism; he subsequently displays a positive response in his eagerness to be a disciple and to proclaim Jesus in the Decapolis (5:18-20). In him the enacted word takes root and

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<sup>16</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing*, 163. Tolbert also sees the parable of the tenants (12:1-11) as a major plot summary. I accept the thrust of Tolbert's thesis with some reservations; for constructive criticisms (especially in regard to the disciples as 'rocky ground') see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Review of Tolbert's *Sowing the Gospel*," *Journal of Religion* 72 (1992): 95-96 and Shiner, *Follow Me!* 17-20. Marcus (*Mystery*, 66) points out that 'there are numerous indications in the Gospel that the Twelve (minus Judas) belong in the end ... to the group represented by the good soil'.

<sup>17</sup> Tolbert's chief contrast is with the disciples (the 'rocky ground') who in 4:40 demonstrate their fear and lack of faith, but to these must be added the fearful Gerasene witnesses.

<sup>18</sup> Marcus, *Mystery*, 38-39, 69-71. Marcus shows here that the 'word' has also been interpreted since antiquity to include the word of the church.

<sup>19</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing*, 136. For a concise consideration of the Markan miracles as parables, see Frank J. Matera, "'He Saved Others; He Cannot Save Himself': A Literary-Critical Perspective on the Markan Miracles," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 15-26.

becomes effective, the fruitfulness of his witness being evidenced by the ‘amazement’ of those who hear his wide proclamation. He is thus analogous to the fourth group in the parable, those who hear the word, accept it and bear fruit.<sup>20</sup>

The negative response is given, however, by the Gerasene witnesses and townspeople. For them, the ‘sown seed’ is fruitless. They see (5:14, 15, 16) but they are blind to the reality and significance of God’s activity revealed in this event. Not understanding, they are filled with fear, and reject Jesus. They are, then, analogous to the first group in the parable, those who do not receive the word at all. The message to the audience is thus an encouragement to respond positively to the mighty works of Jesus, and to become ‘sowers’ themselves.

### **The perception motif in the ‘miracle cycle’**

The parables of 4:1-34 are followed by a series of episodes that narrate miracles, including the story of the Gerasene demoniac. The position of this story within the miracle series may condition the interpretation of the story. Consequently, we will need to identify the literary and rhetorical implications of Mark’s grouping of these stories in order to further clarify the rhetorical impact of the Gerasene demoniac story. Interpreters have come to a variety of conclusions regarding the extent of the ‘miracle cycle’, the ways in which its episodes are related, and the rhetorical thrust of the episodes when they are seen as a group. Many scholars agree that four miracle stories form a literary unit (4:35–5:43), largely on the basis of the sea crossings which link the episodes:<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing*, 167, writes, ‘The healed man clearly produces abundant fruit for everyone to see; he is an example of the good earth that yields a rich harvest.’

<sup>21</sup> Matera, “‘He Saved Others’”. Others include Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 208–09, and Rikki Watts, “Jesus and the New Exodus Restoration of Daughter Zion: Mark 5:21–43 in Context,” in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B.W. Winter*, ed. P.J. Williams, Andrew D. Clarke, Peter M. Head, and David Instone-Brewer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 13–29.



- 4:35-41 Stilling the storm at sea
- 5:1-20 Exorcising the Gerasene demoniac
- 5:21-43 Raising Jairus' daughter
- 5:25-34 Healing the haemorrhaging woman

In the first of these, the terrified disciples at first perceive Jesus as 'teacher' (4:38). After experiencing his miraculous calming of the sea, they are still afraid and still 'have no faith' (4:40). They respond with a question that demands an answer: 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' (4:41).

In the second story, the Gerasene demoniac sees Jesus from a distance (5:6) and approaches him as a suppliant. The demons within the man characteristically and correctly perceive Jesus as 'Son of the Most High God' (5:7; cf. 1:24, 34; 3:11). The other human characters, however—those who come to see (5:14) and observe the man now healed (5:15), and the witnesses who tell the tale (5:16)—all implore Jesus to go away (5:17).

The third and fourth stories are intercalated. Both suppliants, Jairus (5:22, 23) and the haemorrhaging woman (5:27, 28), approach Jesus as a healer, and the resultant miracles are evidence of their correct perceptions and related faith.

What are we to make of this group of four 'mighty deeds'? As mentioned above, several scholars view them in the light of the parables found in the immediately preceding section of the Gospel, and link them specifically with the theme of perception. For example, Matera writes:

Just as the parables are mysterious speech, so Jesus' miracles are mysterious actions. On the one hand, people clearly see what Jesus does ... On the other hand, people do not perceive that, by these actions, Jesus is proclaiming and inaugurating God's kingdom and calling them to repentance. As a result, Jesus' mighty deeds lead to a series of conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

Miracles are used later in the Gospel to make theological points: examples include the healings of the blind men (8:22-26 and 10:46-52) and the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-24). Elizabeth Malbon includes the two feeding miracles

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<sup>22</sup> Matera, "'He Saved Others,'" 18.

(6:33-44 and 8:1-10) as examples of ‘revelations given obliquely’: like the parables, the Markan miracles have ‘more than one level of meaning and are thus subject to the same misunderstanding as the parables’.<sup>23</sup>

Some scholars, attempting to make sense of the ‘doublets’ that seem to be characteristic of the Markan style, have seen a larger pattern that extends further into the Gospel. Paul Achtemeier discerns a double cycle,<sup>24</sup> as does Malbon, while Norman Petersen identifies a triple cycle.<sup>25</sup> Achtemeier and Malbon read the miracle stories of Mark 4:1–8:21 in two groups:<sup>26</sup>

4:35-41 Stilling the storm at sea	6:45-52 Walking on the sea
5:1-20 Exorcising the Gerasene demoniac	6:53-56 Healings at Gennesaret
5:21-43 Raising Jairus’ daughter	7:24b-30 Healing Syrophoenician girl
5:25-34 Healing haemorrhaging woman	7:32-37 Healing the deaf-mute
6:34-44 Feeding the 5000	8:1-10 Feeding the 4000

The two sets of stories obviously correspond, and are balanced by the presence of many ‘echoes and foreshadowings’. For example, each group begins with a sea miracle and ends with a feeding. However, unlike Achtemeier, who seeks sources for the stories, Malbon, like Matera, analyses the rhetorical implications of the stories. She sees a central thrust of the section to be the search for understanding of who Jesus is and of what following him entails, because the entire sequence

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<sup>23</sup> Malbon, “Echoes,” 218–22. Malbon is quoting Madeleine Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1977), 76, 80.

<sup>24</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, “Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae,” *JBL* 89 (1970): 265–91, and Paul J. Achtemeier, “The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 198–221. Achtemeier hypothesises that Mark has rearranged two pre-existing ‘miracle chains’. Fowler (*Loaves and Fishes*, 27–29) notes that Achtemeier seems more interested in exegeting the ‘pre-Markan’ material than in exegeting Mark’s final product; nor does he ever explain the significance of the multiple parallelism. Achtemeier’s only explanation of the function of the demoniac story is that Jesus is lord over demons as he is lord over creation (“Origin and Function”, 206). While this is undoubtedly correct, rhetorical-critical considerations of the cycle offer more fruitful results.

<sup>25</sup> There has been much discussion over the extent to which this material is the product of Mark’s redaction. Mark may well have inherited the placement of these stories from traditional miracle collections. For a survey and critique of the major pre-1980 proposals regarding the structure of the ‘miracle cycles’, see Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*. For an account of Achtemeier’s work, and that of others on the miracle chains, see Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 216–219.

<sup>26</sup> Malbon, “Echoes.”



follows directly from the parables and explanations about understanding (4:1-34) and is followed by Jesus’ conversation with the disciples about understanding (8:13-21).<sup>27</sup>

Petersen comes to a similar conclusion, based on a more detailed structural analysis. His ‘triple cycle’ takes full account both of the repeated elements of the chain of miracle stories and their geographical references (i.e., the sea crossings).<sup>28</sup> His scheme discerns three cycles of stories displaying structural parallelism, interspersed with two ‘intervals’ that themselves demonstrate a triadic structure:

	A (this side)	B (crossing)	C (other side)
Cycle 1	4:1-34 parables by the sea	4:35-41 storm at sea	5:1-20 demoniac
Interval 1	5:21-6:29 (land travel)		
Cycle 2	6:30-44 feeding 5000	6:45-52 walking on the sea	6:53-56 healings
Interval 2	7:1-37 (land travel)		
Cycle 3	8:1-12 feeding 4000	8:13-21 discussion at sea	8:22-26 blind healed

For Petersen, the whole passage (4:1-8:26) is an integral compositional structure serving the specific literary purpose of highlighting the incomprehension of Jesus’ identity, words and actions.

The A episodes each depict Jesus’ actions with crowds on one side of the sea. According to Petersen, the theme of incomprehension is introduced in A1 with the disciples’ lack of understanding of the parable of the seeds. A2 and A3 (the feeding stories) narrate incidents that are referred to in B2 and B3, the narrator’s point being that the disciples have not understood their significance.

The B episodes concern Jesus, the twelve, and their actions while in a boat crossing the sea. In each episode the action has to do with the disciples’ failure to understand who Jesus is (4:41, ‘Who, then, is this?’) and the meaning of what Jesus has done (6:52, ‘they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves’;

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<sup>27</sup> Malbon, “Echoes,” 227–28.

<sup>28</sup> Petersen, “Composition”

8:21, 'Do you not yet understand?'). This amounts to a 'repetitive disclosure of ignorance'.<sup>29</sup>

The C units, beginning with the story of the Gerasene demoniac, depict Jesus' healing of people who either come to him or are brought to him following his arrival on the other side of the lake. They make no mention of the disciples, but are related to them through the motif of seeing, hearing and understanding. The demoniac sees and identifies Jesus (5:6), thus providing an answer to the question in 4:41, but the outsiders (the herders and townspeople) do not understand what Jesus has done, nor who he is, though they see and hear.

The interval units include the healings of Jairus's daughter, the haemorrhaging woman and the Syro-Phoenician woman, but seeing, hearing and understanding are also key issues. In interval 1, Herod hears about Jesus (6:16) but displays a faulty understanding of his identity. In interval 2, neither the Pharisees nor the disciples understand beyond the 'traditions of men' (7:14, 'Listen to Me, all of you, and understand'; 7:18, 'Are you so lacking in understanding also?'). Also in interval 2 the deaf-mute is healed (7:32-37).

For Petersen, the whole section 4:1–8:26 traces the 'history' of the disciples' incomprehension.<sup>30</sup> The disciples, despite being 'insiders'—recipients of the 'mystery of the kingdom'—prove that they have understood no more than the 'outsiders'.<sup>31</sup>

Petersen's scheme is well argued and plausible. It is more satisfying than Achtemeier's not only because he chooses to focus on the final arrangement of the text rather than to engage in speculation about Mark's manipulation of a *Vorlage*, but also because his analysis engages fully with the significance of the parallelism in

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<sup>29</sup> Petersen, "Composition," 196.

<sup>30</sup> Petersen, "Composition," 212.

<sup>31</sup> Petersen, "Composition," 217.



a way that coheres with the rest of the Gospel. However, while the structural parallelism of such grouped stories is striking when presented in tabular form, it is doubtful that the audience could be expected to apprehend the intricacies of the cyclical arrangement in situations where the narrative is orally ‘performed’. It seems more realistic to appeal again to the musical idea of the fugue: the motifs of understanding and incomprehension appear regularly and invite the audience’s attention.

### **Mark 5:1-20 and the ‘miracle cycle’**

According to Malbon, the answer to the foundational question of Jesus’ identity (‘Who then is this man?’ [4:41]) is shouted later in the Gospel as he is revealed as Messiah for Gentiles as well as for Jews (Mark 7 and 8), but 5:1-20 already gives us more than a whispered answer.<sup>32</sup> The demoniac story is connected to both the previous story and the subsequent story by boat journeys. In the previous text-segment (4:35-41) Jesus calms the sea, as he prepares to cross for the first time the geographical boundary that separates Galilee from Gentile territory. The obedience of the wind and the sea to Jesus provokes the disciples’ fearful question: ‘Who then is this man?’ For the implied author, the rhetorical question serves a christological purpose: Jesus has shown himself to be master over the forces of nature. The natural powers fall, as it were, before him. The demoniac then falls before Jesus, who shows himself to be master over the forces of evil that ‘bind’ the man. The story thus functions as part of the answer to the christological question. The audience perceives that Jesus’ authority extends not just to the physical world, but also to the world of spirits, and that by exercising that authority he can transform people.<sup>33</sup> In addition,

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<sup>32</sup> Malbon, “Echoes,” 224.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey John, *The Meaning in the Miracles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 87, notes that the juxtaposition of the sea-calming and the exorcism seems to echo Ps 65:7. While the ‘silencing of the sea’ and the ‘madness of the nations’ is more evident in Hebrew than in the LXX, the text lies within a

by narrating Jesus' care for the demoniac's plight, the story answers the disciples' other question, 'Do you not care that we are perishing?' (4:38).<sup>34</sup>

The lack of perception shown by the disciples on the sea is matched by that of the Gerasenes. The disciples are greatly afraid (ἐφοβήθησαν, 4:41) and do not believe; the Gerasenes fear (ἐφοβήθησαν, 5:15) and ask Jesus to leave. Neither group understands the significance of Jesus' mighty deeds. Camery-Hoggatt points out that the Gerasenes do not know the source of Jesus' power, nor the disposition of Jesus toward them; from their point of view, the loss of the pigs suggests that the power is in some way malevolent.<sup>35</sup> In contrast with the demoniac, who shows no fear of Jesus, the people's fear of Jesus leads to their rejection of him.

The presence of 'seeing' language in the preceding material enables us to see significance in this rejection. Verbs of 'seeing' are prominent in this section: ἰδεῖν (the townspeople, 5:14); θεωροῦσιν (the people again, 5:15); ἰδόντες (the witnesses of the exorcism, 5:16). These verbs recall 4:12—βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν ('in their looking they may look but not see'). Though they have seen the miracle and its results, these people demonstrate by their rejection of Jesus that they are blind to the reality and significance of God's activity revealed in this event. Their non-recognition of Jesus and their rejection of him parallels the responses of the scribes and 'his own people' (3:20-35).

In the subsequent pericope (the 'sandwich' 5:21-43) Jesus is back in Jewish territory. In two incidents, two people fall before him, one before and one after each healing miracle. A woman, 'unclean' because of the 'issue of blood,' touches Jesus' clothes and experiences Jesus' power within herself; she is healed and made 'whole' in her body (5:34).<sup>36</sup> The ministry of Jesus has transcended the requirements of ritual

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cycle of psalms that celebrate the victory of God over both nature and the nations.

<sup>34</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 153.

<sup>35</sup> Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, 135.

<sup>36</sup> Greek ὑγιής; the Hebrew *shalom* may be hinted at by the use of εἰρήνη in the same verse.



cleanliness; he is attending to those who are sick, who need an effective physician (2:17, cf. 5:26).

Jairus, the synagogue official, also falls before Jesus to request ministry.<sup>37</sup> Jesus touches the ‘unclean’ dead body of the twelve year old girl, and she rises to life. In these two incidents Jesus acknowledges and stimulates faith. Although the christological question is not stated, its echo is felt as the ‘great astonishment’ of the witnesses (5:42) recalls the disciples’ ‘great fear’ (4:41).

An expanded form of the christological question is expressed in the story that immediately follows the sequence of the four ‘mighty deeds’. Jesus visits his home town, and the questions asked by the citizens amount to a virtual ‘Who is this man?’ (6:2-3). Although they acknowledge that Jesus has done mighty deeds (6:2), they nevertheless fail to understand their significance; they not only display unbelief (6:6) but also take offence (6:3).

In this context of Jesus’ mastery over physical forces, sickness and death, the pericope about the demoniac is not out of place. Here Jesus calms, not a physical storm, but the situation of chaos in the deranged man. In each case the character of Jesus’ ministry is similar—he displays authority over the forces (physical and spiritual) that threaten human life. Having subdued the power of the sea, Jesus utilises it for his own purpose: it provides the grave for the unclean spirits. In all three stories (the demoniac, Jairus’s daughter and the haemorrhaging woman) it is clear that the audience is to perceive Jesus as the healer, the one who confronts the damaged and the ‘unclean’ and makes them whole. He shows mastery over the unclean spirits, as he shows mastery over sickness and death. The stories provide three scenarios which clearly portray aspects of the ‘human predicament’ and present

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<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that the motif of perception here includes both the visual and the auditory: like the demoniac (5:6) Jairus ‘sees’ Jesus (5:22), while the woman ‘hears’ about him (5:27). The verbs denoting falling differ in each case, but all strongly imply submission in the presence of Jesus. The demoniac: προσκυνέω (5:6); Jairus: πίπτω (5:22); the woman: προσπίπτω (5:33).

Jesus acting in amazing ways that transform both the situation and those who are suffering.

With the help of Petersen's view of this 'cycle', then, it can be seen that the healing stories provide 'an antithetical framework' to the imperception of the disciples.<sup>38</sup> Together with those who 'recognise' Jesus (6:54), the blind man who is healed (8:22-26) and those who are healed in the 'intervals', the Gerasene demoniac provides a dramatic contrast to the disciples, and to the others who fail to receive Jesus. The demoniac story contributes to the sustained theme, conspicuous in its context, that highlights contrasting perceptions and understandings of Jesus, his words and his deeds.

### **Mark 5:1-20 in the rhetoric of perception**

I have shown above how elements of Mark 5:1-20 are prefigured (foreshadowed) in the first three chapters of the text, how the pericope is related to the seed parables, and its relationship to the elements of the 'miracle cycles'. In summary, the story contributes to the rhetoric of perception in four ways:

- (a) reinforcing the perception of Jesus as one who has authority over non-human forces, both physical (the storm) and spiritual (the demons);
- (b) reinforcing the identity of Jesus as perceived correctly by non-human beings (the demons);
- (c) exemplifying again (after the leper, 1:40) the character type who perceives Jesus correctly as a healer, approaches him and falls at his feet. Others who follow this pattern (5:22; 5:27; 7:25; 9:20) are said to have faith;

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<sup>38</sup> The phrase is from Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 114.



(d) exemplifying again the kind of non-recognition of Jesus that is common to certain other groups of characters in the story and that issues in responses of hostility.

### 4.3 Mark 5:1-20 in Mark's rhetoric of purity

From a slightly different perspective, the rhetoric of Mark's Gospel flows out of a fundamental concern with the 'clean' and the 'unclean'. However, in choosing to designate this aspect of his rhetoric 'the rhetoric of purity' I want to employ the term 'purity' in a broader sense than that which concerns merely ritual matters. In a recent study, Steven Bryan argues that

... for Jesus, the lines that divide pure from impure are indistinguishable from the lines that separate good and evil, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.<sup>39</sup>

Purity and eschatology have always been intimately related; Bryan shows that ancient Israel's concern for the purity code was largely energised by the hope of eschatological restoration.<sup>40</sup> I shall have more to say about this in Chapter 5. As part of his revelation of the *new* eschatological awareness brought about by his own coming, Mark's Jesus confronts, in some controversial ways, issues surrounding the division of people and things into the categories of 'clean' and 'unclean', teaching in word and deed a degree of relativisation of ritual purity practices. He is not preoccupied with matters of ritual purity, because his horizon is dominated by the

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<sup>39</sup> Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 161. Similarly, David Rhoads ("Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries," in *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd Ed., ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008], 168–70) demonstrates a consonance in Mark's attitude toward boundaries at the cosmological, social and bodily levels.

<sup>40</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 153. Similarly, W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006], 449–50) distinguishes 'socioreligious purity' and 'cosmological purity'.

greater reality of the kingdom of God, with its emphasis on justice and mercy.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, as the prophets had done, Jesus insists (e.g., 7:1-23) that *moral* impurity should be regarded as more serious than ritual impurity. Jesus thus deals with sin and shows indifference towards unwashed hands.

In Mark's 'rhetoric of purity', then, I include these issues that have to do with both inner (moral) and outer (physical) 'uncleanness' (i.e., socio-religious purity), in addition to those that relate to the context of cosmic conflict, especially the demonic (i.e., 'cosmological purity').<sup>42</sup> In this view, exorcism (the removal of 'unclean' spirits) is seen as a ritual of purification.<sup>43</sup> Most scholars are agreed that a foundational element of Mark's Gospel is Jesus' engagement in a struggle of eschatological import against Satan and all that opposes the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>44</sup> And a vital aspect of the rhetorical thrust of Mark's message is its challenge to its audience to submit to the reign of God. Thus a concern for a holy life, with the expulsion of evil in all its forms, becomes a recurring motif in the 'fugue' of the Gospel.

### **The purity motif in Mark 1-4**

The Gospel begins with a preliminary focus on the ministry of John the Baptist, whose message of 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (1:4) provides a background that acknowledges the pervasive reality of sin and the need for a change of heart. The temptation of Jesus (1:12-13) introduces Satan by name. Mark evidently assumes that Satan's identity is common knowledge. The account lacks

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen C. Barton, "Dislocating and Relocating Holiness: A New Testament Study," in *Holiness Past and Present*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 198. Cf. Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*.

<sup>42</sup> Tate, *Reading Mark from the Outside*, 117.

<sup>43</sup> Klutz, "Grammar," 163. See further Klutz's paper, "When the Unclean Spirit Returns: Demonology, Impurity, and Religious Innovation in the Exorcistic Art of Jesus," *NTS* (forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup> One of the clearest accounts is still that of James M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London: SCM, 1957). Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*., concurs (339, 346).



the details included in other traditions, mentioning only the help of angels, but implying Jesus' ultimate victory.<sup>45</sup> Then comes Jesus' programmatic statement, 'The time is fulfilled, and the reign of God is at hand: repent and believe the good news' (1:15). The saying interprets Jesus' arrival as the inception of a new 'time', a time in which turning from sin to God is the only way to participate in God's kingdom.

Jesus' first exorcism (1:21-28) is also his first 'mighty deed', in which he begins to demonstrate his power over evil in the lives of human beings. The verbal interchange of the demon and Jesus reflects the cosmic scope of the struggle: the words of the demon, 'Have you come to *destroy* us?' (1:24) foreshadows their total defeat, and Jesus' rebuke (ἐπιτιμάω) of the demon shows him, as 'the Holy One of God', performing the function of God (cf. Zech 3:2 LXX, 'The Lord rebuke you, Devil').<sup>46</sup>

Mark first uses ἀκάθαρτος in this passage, referring to the 'unclean' spirit afflicting the man.<sup>47</sup> This story can be seen as a pattern that is elaborated in the episode of the Gerasene demoniac. I will examine this relationship in some detail below. Three more references to demon-possession and exorcism follow: the 'demon-possessed' (δαιμονιζόμενοι) come to Jesus (1:32); he receives them and casts the demons from them (1:34, 39). The observation that 'he did not permit the demons to speak' (1:34) again signals his dominance over them.

Jesus confronts 'uncleanness' again in 1:40-45. A leper (not only physically afflicted but, as a result, also ritually impure) falls on his knees before Jesus (like the Gerasene demoniac) acknowledging his uncleanness and Jesus' ability to make him

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<sup>45</sup> As Lane writes (*Mark*, 60–61), it is enough for Mark here to introduce the adversary of God. Jesus' victory at this point is not the final one; the Gospel will enlarge on the variety of confrontations and temptations to which Jesus is subjected throughout his ministry.

<sup>46</sup> Hendrickx, *Miracle Stories*, 44–45.

<sup>47</sup> Wahlen argues that the expression πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον very probably derives from Mark's traditional sources; see Wahlen, *Impurity*, 106.

clean (καθαρίζω); Jesus sends him away ‘cleansed’ and the man proclaims his healing.

Sin enters the narrative again in the story of the healing of the paralytic (2:1-12). Jesus’ authority to forgive sins (2:5, 7, 9, 10), proved by means of the ‘harder’ thing of healing the paralysis, again puts the spotlight on the removal of ‘inner’ impurity. The episode in 2:15-17 raises the issue of ritual impurity for the second time, for Jesus associates closely with ‘sinners’—those whose way of life is not approved by the Jewish religious leaders.<sup>48</sup> Jesus casts himself in the role of a physician, calling for response from those who know themselves to be sick. In this pericope and the subsequent sections (2:18 – 3:6) Jesus sets aside the concerns of the ‘scribes of the Pharisees’ for strict adherence to the traditions of fasting and sabbath observance; it is already clear (since he has touched the leper, 1:41) that his criteria of ‘purity’ are not to be found in these rituals. Mark labels the Pharisees ‘hard-hearted’, and, as if to underline this diagnosis, Jesus performs another restorative act on a man’s withered hand.

In 3:15 Jesus gives his twelve disciples authority to cast out demons. This leads to a pericope in which the cosmic conflict comes once again to the fore, as Jesus, himself accused of being in league with ‘the ruler of demons’, provides an authoritative interpretation of his own life and work as one who is stronger than the ‘Strong Man’ (3:20-30). This passage is examined in more detail below.

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<sup>48</sup> Ritual impurity is not to be equated with sin. As James Dunn points out [“Jesus and Holiness: The Challenge of Purity,” in *Holiness Past and Present*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 173–79], ceremonial impurity was an unavoidable consequence of daily life; the impure did not need forgiveness but cleansing. However, impurity and sin were never far apart. They went hand in hand in the factional polemic whereby the Pharisees attributed sin (breaking the law) to others’ ritual impurity, condemning and shunning them. For an introduction to the debate on ἁμαρτωλοί see James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 61–88.



The opposition of Satan emerges again in the parable of the sower. He is the one who ‘snatches away the word’ (4:15) which, when correctly perceived and responded to, leads to repentance and forgiveness (4:12).

New elements appear in the story of Jesus calming the sea (4:35-41). Death threatens as the wind and the waves seem to rise in attack against Jesus and his disciples in the boat; the terror of the twelve is answered by Jesus’ authoritative rebuke of the natural elements—he has ‘exorcised’ the sea!

By the time the narrative reaches the Gerasene demoniac, the audience is thoroughly attuned to the various nuances of Mark’s rhetoric of purity. They know that Jesus’ agenda includes forgiveness of sins and the challenge of μετάνοια. They know that the life of the kingdom of God involves ongoing struggle with Satan, and that Jesus has strong dominance over him, evidenced in Jesus’ testing in the desert and explained by way of the interpretive model of the Strong Man. In addition, they know that Jesus has power over demons who have invaded humans (indeed, exorcism is to be a continuing ministry of the disciples) and over the forces of nature. They also know that Jesus approaches and associates with people who are ‘unclean’ for a variety of reasons, and that he shows indifference to the prevailing purity code.

These elements of ‘the story so far’ must condition the effects of the Gerasene episode on the audience. The following sections will examine in more detail some of these connections, first with the Capernaum exorcism (1:21-28) and then with the Strong Man passage (3:20-30). I will then consider the Gerasene episode as part of its immediate literary context, the related group of Jesus’ ‘mighty deeds’. Finally there will be a discussion of the episode’s connections with later exorcism accounts and the didactic passage, 7:1-23.

### Mark 5:1-20 and the Capernaum exorcism

The Gerasene exorcism shares many characteristics of the earlier one located at Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28). Myers calls both of these stories ‘inaugural exorcisms’ marking Jesus’ entrances into ‘new symbolic territory,’ that is, public synagogue ministry and ministry on Gentile land.<sup>49</sup> Both exorcisms function strongly to identify Jesus in a cosmic conflict context, the former foreshadowed by Jesus’ struggle with Satan in the desert (1:13) and the latter by his conquest of the sea (4:35-41).<sup>50</sup> The demoniac story in 5:1-20 expands and elaborates many of the elements of the first exorcism story in 1:21-28. In that story there is less emphasis on the demon-possessed man. He is not described, either before or after the exorcism. The account is seemingly the bare bones of a ‘classical’ exorcism, with no trimmings, and it serves a christological purpose, for it evokes the questioning of 1:27 (‘What is this? A new teaching with authority!’) and the spread of Jesus’ fame throughout Galilee. It establishes Jesus’ authority to teach (1:22), an authority that is then supported by his authority to exorcise (1:27). His word is supported by his deed, and this principle is repeated with expansion in 2:1-12, where Jesus’ authority to forgive sins is supported by his authority to heal the paralytic man.

A comparison of the stories suggests several modes of expansion. First, there is a geographical expansion in the Gerasene exorcism, into the land across the sea—the Gentile Decapolis. Second, there is a numerical expansion: a legion of demons is expelled rather than just one. Third, many more details about the Gerasene are narrated, both before and after the exorcism, so that the audience is able to contrast the two situations. Fourth, several sources of ‘impurity’ are brought together. Whereas the ‘unclean’ element in the first story is the ‘unclean spirit’ itself, the ‘unclean’ elements in the second story are numerous. The land is Gentile, and thus

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<sup>49</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 192.

<sup>50</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 349.



‘unclean’ to Jews; the ‘unclean spirit’ appears immediately; the man’s dwelling is amongst the tombs (again ‘unclean’, and mentioned three times); and pigs (‘unclean’ animals) are feeding on the hillside. Nevertheless, Jesus is confident to venture into this scenario of ‘impurity’.

This technique of expansion has been called ‘staggered intensification’.<sup>51</sup> The Gerasene exorcism is an intensification of the Capernaum exorcism just as the story of Jesus walking on the sea is an intensification of his stilling the storm.<sup>52</sup> By this means it is demonstrated that the power of Jesus’ rescue-response to distress is overwhelming, beyond the understanding of the disciples (in the case of the sea epiphanies) and of the witnesses (in the case of the Gerasene).

In both stories Mark uses πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον rather than the less specific δαίμων/δαιμόνιον, which he also uses synonymously elsewhere;<sup>53</sup> this usage suitably draws attention to Jesus’ deconstruction of purity and defilement boundaries.<sup>54</sup> The phrase ‘unclean spirit’ (5:2) immediately creates for the audience an expectation, based on the previous exorcism, that Jesus will cast it out.

The basic elements of the exorcisms are similar: in each there is a man with an unclean spirit, who cries out with a loud voice, Τί ἐμοὶ (ἡμῖν) καὶ σοί? and names Jesus with an exalted title, identifying correctly both him and his terrifying mission—their torment (5:7) and destruction (1:24). In each story Jesus gives the command (ἔξελθε) and the spirit(s) come out, to the amazement or fear of onlookers. Because of what has happened in the earlier exorcism, the reader already knows much about Jesus and about his methods by the time the Gerasene demoniac is

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<sup>51</sup> Torchia, “Eschatological Elements,” 6.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52 and John 6:15b–21* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 126.

<sup>53</sup> For a summary of the ‘semantic drift’ of the word δαίμων, see Frieden, “Language,” 42–50.

<sup>54</sup> On this see Pimentel, “Unclean Spirits”. Pimentel points out that in all four of Mark’s exorcism stories, the problem is first characterised as an ‘unclean spirit,’ and only after this is the term ‘demon’ used as a synonym. A more recent comprehensive study is that of Wahlen, *Impurity*.

introduced. The latter story is narrated with details that add to the reader's understanding: the christological implications of the first exorcism are heightened in the second. If Jesus can evoke awe through a basic exorcism, in which he is identified as 'Holy One of God', the second much more complex one adds immeasurable weight to Jesus' status.

The first exorcism is labelled a διδαχή—'a new teaching with authority' (1:27). That is, Jesus' words and deeds both demonstrate the quality of authority, of a kind not seen before. In parallel with this earlier exorcism, the Gerasene exorcism can also be regarded as a διδαχή—an indirect teaching, with (again) abundant evidence of authority over a much greater number of evil spirits. David Smith comments that, in fact, *all* of Mark's Gospel is διδαχή for the audience: 'Each of Jesus' most revealing teaching moments escapes the grasp of the disciples, yet is clearly communicated to the audience, heightening the ironic experience.'<sup>55</sup>

The unique features of the Gerasene exorcism are, of course, the multiplicity of demons and their expulsion into the pigs. These features serve to emphasise the power and destructiveness of the demons.<sup>56</sup>

### **Mark 5:1-20 and the Strong Man**

The interchange recounted in Mark 3:20-30 is foundational for the interpretation of the exorcism narratives as eschatological power struggles.<sup>57</sup> It reports Jesus' response to scribes who claim that he exorcises by the power of Beelzeboul, the ruler of demons, by whom he is possessed (3:22, 30). Jesus demolishes this absurd claim

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<sup>55</sup> David F. Smith, "Can We Hear?" 194–5.

<sup>56</sup> Williams, *Other Followers*, 110. Curiously, the account of the drowning of the pigs introduces an echo of the parable of the sower: in that story evil things enter (εἰσπορευόμεναι) and choke (συνπνίγουσιν) the word (4:19), while here evil things enter (εἰσῆλθον) and are themselves choked (ἐπνίγοντο) in the sea (5:13).

<sup>57</sup> The material here is common to Mark and Q; for discussion see, amongst others, Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 328–32.



by showing that it is fundamentally flawed, requiring a division in Satan's 'kingdom' (3:23-26). He then gives, in parabolic form, his own clear explanation of his relationship to Satan and his 'house': Satan is a 'strong man', and it is Jesus' role to 'bind him and plunder his house' (3:27).

There are two significant verbal correspondences between this passage and the Gerasene narrative. The first is the 'strong man' motif. The word (ὁ ἰσχυρός, 3:27) represents the kind of formidable and warlike figure referred to in Isaiah 49:24-25 (LXX), which speaks of salvation in terms of taking spoils from a giant (παρὰ γίγαντος) or from a strong man (παρὰ ἰσχύοντος).<sup>58</sup> Mark's audience may well remember that Jesus is described earlier as 'the stronger one' (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός ) by John the Baptist (1:7). In Gerasa, no human is 'strong enough' (ἰσχύω, 5:4) to subdue the demoniac because of his enormous strength.<sup>59</sup> This human inability recurs in 9:18, where the disciples are not strong enough (ἰσχύω) to cast out a mute boy.

'Binding' (δέω) is also a key word in this passage (3:27) and in 5:3-4. In the parable, binding the Strong Man releases his property (τὰ σκεύη), which, by analogy with the text of Isaiah 49, would include his captives. In the exorcisms, Jesus demonstrates that he is strong enough to bind the Strong Man., and, in doing so, to release those who have been bound. Sorenson points out that Jesus' Strong Man parable internalizes the idea of conquest that is conceived of in Isaiah 49 as an external political event.<sup>60</sup> The exorcisms again give this idea external expression as they bring significant liberation to human beings.

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<sup>58</sup> Isaiah 49:24-25 LXX reads: 'Would someone take spoils from a giant? And if someone should unjustly take captive, would the captive be rescued? Thus says the Lord: "If even someone should capture a giant, he would take his spoils, and the one who takes them from the strong man will be rescued. I will decide your judgement, and I will free your sons".'

<sup>59</sup> I noted in Chapter 3 that evil spirits (πνεύματα πονηρά) are also called 'strong spirits' (πνεύματα ἰσχυρά) in 1 Enoch 15:8-9.

<sup>60</sup> Sorensen, *Possession*, 141.

The Strong Man pericope thus provides the interpretive key by which all the exorcistic activity of Jesus in the Gospel can be seen to visualise the eschatological message of the kingdom of God overcoming evil powers. Mark 5:1-20 functions as a compelling illustration of the truth of Jesus' claim to be stronger than Satan.

### Mark 5:1-20 and 'the anomalous frightful'

Douglas Geyer identifies a group of nine stories (4:35-6:56) that he calls a 'cycle of uncertainty'.<sup>61</sup> It includes the Gerasene exorcism:

4:35-41	Jesus pacifies a dangerous sea
5:1-20	Jesus exorcises the Gerasene demoniac
5:21-24; 35-43	Jesus raises a dead girl
5:25-34	Jesus heals a woman with uterine pathology
6:1-6	Jesus is rejected at his home town
6:7-13; 30-32	Jesus sends out the twelve disciples
6:14-29	Herod kills John the Baptist
6:33-44	Jesus feeds 5000 with bread and fish
6:45-52	Jesus appears as a ghost on a dangerous sea

For Geyer, this section is a unit, not least because of the *inclusio* of the first and last stories, which present situations where Jesus and the disciples confront terror on the sea at night. Geyer offers a substantial raft of observations that lend weight to the compositional unity of the section.<sup>62</sup> However, apart from these lexical and stylistic factors, Geyer notes that each of the component stories engages the imagination and emotions of the readers in the area of (what he calls) the 'anomalous frightful'. This, he believes, is a significant function of the section. The stories provide concentrated doses of fear (in storm, sickness and death), the bizarre (demons and a ghost), anomaly (Jesus fails to convince the Nazarenes), impurity and disaster (untimely deaths). These elements, characteristic of the Gospel as a whole,

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<sup>61</sup> Geyer, *Fear*.

<sup>62</sup> Geyer, *Fear*, 79–84. These two stories have some common lexical elements: both happen at night (ὀψίας γενομένης, 4:35; 6:47), and when Jesus intervenes, the wind (ἄνεμος, 4:37, 39; 6:48, 51) ceases (κοπάζω, 4:39; 6:51).



contribute to a representation of Jesus as ‘a character around whom people felt neither comfortable nor coherent’.<sup>63</sup>

Geyer’s work is valuable in alerting us to the presence of the ‘emotional markers’ in these stories. They are certainly part of the rhetoric, and Geyer rightly insists that ‘we must respond to them or we shall risk not getting the message’.<sup>64</sup> However, in maintaining that Mark intends the reader to come away ‘agitated, unsettled and confused’<sup>65</sup> Geyer may be misjudging both the author and the audience.

In my view, Geyer’s reading ultimately goes against the grain of the Gospel, because the Gospel bears within itself the answers to readers’ questions about who Jesus is and why things happen. Timothy Dwyer, in his book *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (a work with which Geyer, unfortunately, does not engage), points out that confrontation with the uncanny or the ‘wholly other’ is a crisis experience that may lead one either to flee or to worship.<sup>66</sup> The latter response is more in line with Mark’s agenda, as Dwyer demonstrates; in Mark’s rhetoric, wonder and fear (as awe) cannot be dissociated from the revelation of God’s power in the words and deeds of Jesus.

Moreover, Geyer ignores irony in the reading event. The audience knows, both because the author tells them, and because they are post-resurrection people, that behind the strangeness of the miraculous events and the violent death of Jesus are causes and explanations rooted in biblical eschatological understanding. The audience is not overawed by the demonic in the Gerasene exorcism story; rather, they are heartened because the man is transformed. They are not frightened by the ghost story, because they perceive that in Jesus, God’s rule is breaking in to save

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<sup>63</sup> Geyer, *Fear*, 272.

<sup>64</sup> Geyer, *Fear*, 85.

<sup>65</sup> Geyer, *Fear*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Dwyer, *Wonder*, 199.

with power. While fully participating in the horror of the crucifixion, they know that Jesus is risen.

Despite the shortcomings of Geyer's reading, he does open up for us the importance of recognising the strange, uncanny and 'awe-ful' aspects of the narrated Gerasene exorcism. These aspects highlight the dramatic extent of the transformation of the man, but, perhaps more importantly, they draw attention to the narrative context of 'cosmic struggle' which is foundational to an understanding of Mark's Gospel: Jesus is, throughout, in eschatological conflict with the demonic powers.

### **Exorcism and intertextuality in the 'four mighty deeds'**

I have already drawn attention to intertextual elements in the Gerasene demoniac story (see Chapter 3). If we take a wider view of the story in its literary context of the 'miracle cycle'—the 'four mighty deeds' of 4:35-5:43—we find hermeneutical significance that is derived from earlier biblical tradition. Extending his earlier study in which he reads Mark's Gospel in the light of the 'new exodus' promised in the final sections of Isaiah, Rikki Watts demonstrates in this segment of the Gospel many parallels with Isaianic material.<sup>67</sup> Watts sees the first two of Jesus' 'mighty deeds' as a pair depicting Jesus in the role of the Yahweh-warrior, and the second intercalated pair as depicting Jesus in the role of the restorer of Israel. Isaiah 63:7 – 64:12 is a lament deploring Israel's sins, remembering God's ancient mercies, and imploring God to 'rend the heavens and come down' to redeem Israel. The subsequent passage, Isaiah 65–66, is God's response, warning his enemies of retribution, but promising a new creation for his own people, with blessings of joy

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<sup>67</sup> Rikki Watts, "Daughter Zion".



and peace. Correspondences of the ‘miracle cycle’ with this material and other related passages are tabulated below.

MARK	ISAIAH
Mk 4:35-41 Jesus stills the storm	God leads Israel through the sea (Isa 63:11-13) God controls the waters (51:9-10)
Mk 5:1-20 Tombs, pigs and demons Demons drown	Each is mentioned in Isa 65:1-4 (demons in LXX) Enemies of Israel drown (Isa 43:16-17; cf 51:9-10)
Mk 5:21-24; 35-43 Weeping over Jairus’s daughter The daughter dies ‘Arise’ - <i>Talitha kount</i> ‘Fear not’ (5:36) Amazement (5:42) Salvation/healing (5:23)	No more weeping (Isa 65:19) No more premature death (65:20) ‘Arise’ - <i>qûmî</i> (60:1) ‘Fear not’ (40:9; 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4) ‘Awesome things we did not expect’ (64:3) Salvation (57:17; 60:16; 62:1,11; 63:1,8,9 etc.)
Mk 5:25-34 Haemorrhaging woman ‘unclean’ ‘Touched his garment’ (5:28) ‘Daughter’ (5:34) ‘Trembling’ (5:33) Salvation/healing (5:28,34) ‘Peace’ (5:34)	Filthy garments (64:7) ‘No one .. takes hold of you’ (64:7) God is Father to Israel (63:16; 64:8) Trembling (66:2,5) Salvation (see above) Peace (57:19; 66:12 etc.)

In addition to these conceptual parallels, the number twelve is a feature of the last two episodes, additionally indicating that the two ‘daughters’ symbolise Israel. Mark evidently sees these stories as part of the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecies. Watts summarises the import of the cycle of stories:

Isaiah’s new exodus has come. Deliverance from demonic oppressors has begun. Daughter Zion, wasting away in her uncleanness, even ‘dead’ in exile, can be cleansed and resurrected, if only she will repent and believe the good news.<sup>68</sup>

This appeal to intertextual correspondences lays a foundation for a satisfying and realistic interpretation. Intertextuality, functioning as a rhetorical device, has the

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<sup>68</sup> Rikki Watts, “Daughter Zion,” 29.

potential for engendering understanding in those who can recognise the allusions.<sup>69</sup> Recognition of these significances enables Mark's audience to situate the stories in the larger narrative of the workings of God, seeing them as demonstrations of Jesus' roles as victor and restorer in Jewish eschatological perspective. The demoniac story, then, in this view, furthers both Mark's christological project (Jesus takes to himself the purpose and power of God in his conflict with Satan) and the paraenetic/evangelical thrust of the Gospel (humanity, not just Israel, can be restored at the hands of Jesus, the Son of God).

### **Mark 5:1-20, the later exorcisms and 'inner' purity**

Mark's concern with purity issues continues in the episodes subsequent to the Gerasene exorcism. In the intercalated pericopae which follow (5:21-43) Jesus transcends the requirements of ritual purity as he is touched by a woman with a haemorrhage and as he touches a girl who is reputedly dead. The setting for these stories is Jewish. They confront the issue of contamination resulting from bodily discharges and from touching corpses.<sup>70</sup> Jesus seems indifferent to both sources of impurity. Mark's audience is not surprised by this because they have been prepared, especially by the proliferated uncleanness of the Gerasene demoniac episode, to see Jesus face such impurity fearlessly, to restore the afflicted ones and to come away unscathed.

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Hays' study of intertextuality in Mark's Gospel leads him to suggest that the imperative βλέπετε τί ἀκούετε (4:24) urges the audience's close attention, deep reflection and generous interpretation of scriptural allusions. Thus the sense is 'listen closely to what might be hidden in the text'. ('Jesus as the Embodiment of the God of Israel?', paper given to the NT Seminar, Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge, 11.11.08).

<sup>70</sup> Wahlen (*Impurity*, 86, n. 91) claims that impurity plays no explicit role in the outer Jairus story because ambiguity remains as to whether the girl is really dead or only sleeping. However, Marcus (*Mark 1-8*, 371) is more realistic in viewing the professional mourners (5:38) as 'experts on death', and Jesus' metaphor of sleep as 'eschatological irony'. For a detailed discussion of corpse impurity and impurity resulting from discharges, see Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 161–98.



Among other episodes are two more exorcisms. Clinton Wahlen has drawn attention to the significance of the chiastic arrangement of the four exorcism stories in the Gospel.<sup>71</sup> The first and the last take place on Jewish territory, with scribes present, and show some verbal parallels (σπαράσσω, θαυβέομαι, ἐξέρχομαι). The inner two exorcisms are of Gentiles in Gentile lands.

- A: 1:21-28 Exorcism among Jews (Capernaum)
- B: 5:1-20 Exorcism among Gentiles (Gerasa)
- C: 7:1-23 Discussion of ritual purity
- B<sup>1</sup>: 7:24-30 Exorcism among Gentiles (Tyre)
- A<sup>1</sup>: 9:14-29 Exorcism among Jews (the mute boy)

In the central position between the two pairs of exorcisms is the group of sayings in Mark 7:1-23, which form part of Jesus' sustained challenge to Jewish ideas of purity. This passage has already been discussed as part of Mark's 'rhetoric of instruction' (see 2.3 above, where the passage was treated in terms of Jesus' 'new paradigm'). In the context of Mark's 'rhetoric of purity', though, the passage is significant for what it says about Jews and Gentiles.

The Pharisees and scribes observe Jesus' disciples eating with unwashed (and thus 'impure') hands, neglecting the 'traditions of the elders' (1-5). Jesus turns their accusation around: in holding to their traditions the Pharisees neglect the commands of God (6-13). Then, signalling the importance of the saying with 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand' (14), Jesus explains that defilement has its origin not with what goes into a person, but with what comes out (15). In private his disciples question him about the 'parable', and he lists some of the evils that issue 'from the heart' and defile (κοινώω) a person (17-23). Thus the expansionist Jewish perception of the purity code as a set of protective mechanisms (hand-washing and dietary restrictions) to keep impurity out is challenged by Jesus' assertion that impurity is already in.<sup>72</sup> His 'new paradigm' of the kingdom of God clearly calls for

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<sup>71</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity*, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 163–64.

the priority of moral purity, and makes concerns for ritual impurity subordinate to this.<sup>73</sup>

For Wahlen, the position of 7:1-23 at the centre of the chiasm of exorcisms means that the passage speaks not about what is unclean but about who is unclean:

Fundamentally all four exorcisms are of the same nature. Demons are no respecters of persons. They affect Jews and Gentiles in very similar ways ... Purity language is used ironically to show that both Jews and Gentiles can belong in a greater Israel.<sup>74</sup>

Wahlen argues that this bracketing places Gentiles firmly within the ambit of the grace of God as manifested in the healing ministry of Jesus. Although it seems unlikely that an audience would discern this chiasm, the implications of the passage for Gentile ministry are clear: Jesus is dismantling the traditional boundaries that have separated the strictly-observant Jewish community from those outside, including ‘sinners’ and Gentiles. These implications are reinforced by the three episodes immediately subsequent to 7:1-23, as they all exemplify Jesus’ ministry to Gentiles. These are the exorcism of the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter (7:24-30, which explicitly addresses the issue of the Gentiles in relation to Israel), the healing of the deaf boy (7:31-37) and the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10). These miracle stories implicitly instruct the audience that, just as Jesus ‘declared all foods clean’ (7:19), he also declared all peoples clean—acceptable in the new community of the kingdom of God.<sup>75</sup>

Before I summarise this section, it needs to be made clear that despite Jesus’ insistence that ‘there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him’ (7:15), ‘unclean spirits’ are an obvious exception. Since they are able to be

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<sup>73</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and Purity* Halakhah, 347. Todd Klutz (‘When the Unclean Spirit Returns’, forthcoming paper in *NTS*) wonders whether the event depicted in Mark 5:1-20 stands in a structurally antithetic position vis-à-vis the Yom Kippur ritual as outlined in Leviticus 16. The latter is clearly intended as a remedy for *moral* impurity, i.e. it cleanses from sin (Lev 16:30, 34) whereas exorcism remedies the impurity of the interiorised yet foreign spirit being.

<sup>74</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity*, 101, 107.

<sup>75</sup> Malbon, “Echoes,” 226.



driven out, they have been able to enter; 9:25 (cf. Lk 8:30; 11:24-26) makes this quite explicit.<sup>76</sup> John Riches would explain Mark's apparent inconsistency as an example of his adoption of multiple 'mythologies'—the weaving together of a 'cosmic dualist' view, in which evil invades the world and is responsible for evil, and a 'forensic' view that sees the source of evil in the human heart.<sup>77</sup> In the early chapters of Mark's Gospel, and certainly in the Gerasene story, the former worldview seems predominant. However, it is clear that in 7:19 Jesus is talking specifically about food, so Mark (or possibly a post-Markan glossator) can redactionally comment that Jesus here 'cleanses' (καθαρίζω) all foods, which is to say that he *declares* all foods to be 'clean'—there is no need to guard the boundary of the body with respect to foods which have been previously labelled 'unclean'. For Jesus, the only things really 'unclean' are those that compromise holiness before God.<sup>78</sup> These include the inner defilements of 7:1-23 and the 'unclean spirits'. The demoniac has been made unclean by the entrance of another unclean *being*; his whole person has been affected, including his heart. The exorcism has made him clean.<sup>79</sup>

### **Mark 5:1-20 in the rhetoric of purity**

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be seen that the Gerasene demoniac story contributes to Mark's rhetoric of purity in at least six ways:

(a) Mark 5:1-20 picks up and intensifies elements of impurity foreshadowed earlier in the Gospel, and provides a dramatic solution to them.

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<sup>76</sup> In the parable of the sower and the seeds, both the word (4:15) and worldly concerns (4:19) are also able to enter into people.

<sup>77</sup> Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*.

<sup>78</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 164–68, distinguishes between defilement and desecration.

<sup>79</sup> Rhoads, "Social Criticism," 174.

- (b) It reinforces Mark's presentation of Jesus as the stronger combatant in the struggle with Satan and the demonic, Jesus' dramatic success in exorcism demonstrating his eschatological victory in a way that surpasses all other accounts in the Gospel.
- (c) It exemplifies dramatically the 'cleansing' ministry of Jesus, demonstrating that the effects of his eschatological victory extend to the liberation of humans from 'uncleanness'.
- (d) It reinforces Jesus' radical relativisation of the Jewish requirements for ritual purity.
- (e) It strongly reinforces the Gospel's presentation of Gentiles as beneficiaries of Christian ministry, showing that prevailing Jewish views of social and religious boundaries are being dissolved.
- (f) It provides a basis for the narration of further ministry to Gentiles in subsequent episodes.

#### **4.4 Mark 5:1-20 in Mark's rhetoric of discipleship**

A feature of Mark's 'fugal' composition is the recurrence of themes. In the pericope of the Gerasene demoniac the motifs of perception and purity make their appearance, as highlighted above, each contributing to the rhetorical effect of the Gospel. A third theme is that of discipleship and proclamation: the healed demoniac can be seen as a follower of Jesus and a proclaimer of his good news. In this section I will investigate how an audience might discern discipleship issues in the story, and how these might be transformative.



After briefly tracing the discipleship/proclamation motif through Mark's Gospel, I will consider the Gerasene demoniac story as 'good news'. Then I will consider links with the 'fishers of men' saying (1:17) and the discipleship sayings of Mark 8:34-38. Finally, I will consider how the episode coheres rhetorically with the 'secrecy motif'.

### **The discipleship/proclamation motif in Mark's Gospel**

The twin themes of discipleship and proclamation are announced very early in the Gospel. Jesus makes his appearance with a proclamation (1:14-15) that is in line not only with that of John the Baptist (1:4) but also with that of 'Isaiah the prophet' (1:2). That is, Jesus' words 'the time is fulfilled' signal good news of eschatological events that are about to happen: he is commencing a mission that will 'bind up the broken-hearted' and bring 'liberty to captives' (Isa 61:1).<sup>80</sup> Mark immediately follows this programmatic proclamation with the calling of Jesus' first disciples to follow him and to become 'fishers of men' (ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων, 1:16-20). This metaphor is examined in more detail below. The call to 'follow' stands as the paradigmatic inauguration of Jesus' mission as it pertains to the disciples.<sup>81</sup> Both in 1:17 and in 3:14 (where Jesus appoints the Twelve) discipleship (being 'with Jesus' and following him) is foundational for the subsequent proclamation of the 'good news' by his followers. Their proclamation is part of their given task as disciples, and its content includes evidence of what they have seen and heard.

Proclamation of the 'good news' is one of the central features of Jesus' activity (1:14, 38, 39; 2.2). In addition, the disciples, as participants in the life,

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<sup>80</sup> Green, "Mark," 144–47.

<sup>81</sup> Keck, "Introduction," 362–63.

ministry (and death) of Jesus,<sup>82</sup> are commissioned to go and proclaim (κηρύσσω) this ‘good news’ as part of their response to it (3:13-14; 6:7-13; 13:10; 14:9). However, proclamation is echoed throughout Mark’s story, as many of the beneficiaries of Jesus’ ministry announce publicly and widely what Jesus has done for them. Jesus’ fame spreads especially quickly in 1:21-39—Mark hyperbolically notes that as a result of Jesus’ miracles the whole of Galilee (1:28, 39) including whole towns (1:33) hear about him. The leper (1:45), the Gerasene demoniac (5:20) and the crowd that has witnessed Jesus healing a deaf man (7:36) all play their part in the proclamation. In every case it is indeed ‘good news’ of restoration.

Likewise, the theme of discipleship is progressively elaborated as the Gospel unfolds. Although the Twelve function more often as negative examples, their attitudes provide opportunities for Mark to highlight Jesus’ corrective teaching, and the ‘minor’ characters, including the Gerasene demoniac, are also important as vivid models of discipleship.<sup>83</sup>

### **Mark 5:1-20 as ‘good news’**

The rhetorical importance of the ‘good news’ motif was discussed in Chapter 2. What part does Mark 5:1-20 play in this rhetoric of proclamation? At the end of the story, the Gerasene ex-demoniac begins to ‘proclaim in the Decapolis the great things Jesus has done for him’ (5:20). His public witness foreshadows the preaching of the disciples (6:12). He has begun to enjoy the experience of a powerful

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<sup>82</sup> Keck (“Introduction,” 364) notes perceptively that the pre-Passion narrative begins and ends with the notion of participation in Jesus’ life and death: John’s prediction that ‘He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit’ (1:8) is mirrored by Jesus’ assertion that the disciples will share with him the ‘baptism’ of his impending death (10:38-39).

<sup>83</sup> The standard works on discipleship include John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983); Best, *Following Jesus*; and Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986). More recent studies include Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterisation*; Shiner, *Follow Me!* and Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*.



liberation, and this is his own 'good news', although the word εὐαγγέλιον is not used. Jesus' 'mighty deeds' themselves are central to the demoniac's *kerygma*.<sup>84</sup> While the content is his testimony about Jesus, he himself demonstrates the authority and the transforming power of Jesus which has freed him from entrapment.<sup>85</sup> The man's acceptance of his freedom, his eagerness to be a disciple of Jesus, and his own proclamation are all evidence of his repentance and belief—both key elements of the 'good news' as it is first proclaimed by Jesus (1:15). Thus the ex-demoniac fully participates in the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

As noted in my previous chapter, the story of the Gerasene advances Mark's treatment of the spread of the good news to the Gentiles. This is prepared for in 2:1-3:6, as the traditional Jewish community begins to reject Jesus, and later as Jesus begins to preach outside Jewish borders (3:7-8) and to call a new community in which disciples and 'whoever does the will of God' are included in his 'family' (3:31-35). After the Gerasene event, Jesus continues to minister to Gentiles, *viz.*, the Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30) and the deaf man (7:31-37). The latter episode takes place in the region of the Decapolis; the people there are eager, receptive and grateful, conceivably owing to the testimony of the Gerasene demoniac. Moreover, the second feeding story (8:1-9) involves a Gentile crowd.<sup>86</sup> Thus all these stories demonstrate that the 'good news' is inclusive of Gentile audiences. Especially in the light of 13:10 (the 'good news' is to be proclaimed to 'all nations'), Mark's Gospel itself can be regarded as a proclamation of Jesus for an audience that includes non-Jews.

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<sup>84</sup> Matera ("He Saved Others", 24) comments that Mark 'cannot conceive of Jesus proclaiming the gospel apart from mighty deeds'.

<sup>85</sup> Moloney, *Storyteller*, 187-88.

<sup>86</sup> Malbon ("Echoes," 217) notes that 'it is the implied reader, of course, who is the primary beneficiary of this addition'.

### Mark 5:1-20 as a ‘fishing’ story

Jesus’ statement, ‘I will make (ποιήσω) you to become fishers of people’ (1:17) is a statement of intention, and a promise of transformation. The disciples, having begun to follow Jesus, will become something else. The use of the verb ποιέω, used again when Jesus ‘appoints’ the Twelve (3:14, 16), signals that Jesus himself is the agent of this change.<sup>87</sup> His prediction engenders in the audience a strong expectation that they will see changes in these fishermen. However, though Jesus immediately makes (ποιεῖ) the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak (7:37), his fashioning of the disciples will not be achieved with such dramatic and decisive results as the physical healings, exorcisms and works of power. His ‘making’ will require a process of shaping, molding and training.<sup>88</sup>

Jesus uses a metaphor derived from their present occupation and applies it to their future vocation as his disciples: from being fishermen (ἀλιεῖς) in the normal sense of the word, they will be made into fishermen who catch people, with a view to salvation.

This interpretation of ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων seems clear from the context, for although the OT connotations of ‘fishing’ are ominous, the metaphor’s use here as a figure of judgement would not cohere with the Gospel’s proclamation of ‘good news’.<sup>89</sup> In a recent study, Dominic Rudman has highlighted the metaphor’s deeper

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<sup>87</sup> Marcus (*Mark 1–8*, 267, 481) suggests (perhaps too boldly) that καὶ ἐποίησεν in 3:14 alludes to the same phrase found several times in Gen 1(LXX), showing that Jesus is here cast in the role of ‘creator’.

<sup>88</sup> A possible reason for Jesus’ inability to transform the disciples more speedily may be found in his inability to do (ποιῆσαι) works of power in Nazareth because of the people’s lack of faith (6:5). The disciples’ lack of faith is evident at several points in the story, notably at 4:40.

<sup>89</sup> See Charles W.F. Smith, “Fishers of Men: Footnotes on a Gospel Figure,” *HTR* 52 (1959): 187–203. Smith cites Jer 16:16; Ezek 29:4-5; Amos 4:2; Hab 1:14-17; 1QH 3:26; 5:7-8. In Smith’s view, Jesus is calling the disciples to serve as agents of the kingdom of God, gathering people for eschatological judgement. However, Jesus’ mission is to rescue people *from* judgement, not catch them *for* judgement (France, *Gospel*, 97). Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 61, points out that the fishing imagery Jer 16:16 intimates judgement within the broader context of restorative salvation (Jer 16:14-15). In Matthew 13:42-50 the metaphor explicitly represents both judgement and salvation, as angels make a distinction between good and bad fish.



resonances with OT theology. Because Jewish thought identified the sea with the forces of chaos in opposition to creation, Mark's designation of the lake as θάλασσα (1:16) emphasises the chaotic associations of fishing.<sup>90</sup> The sea, like the wilderness, is a place of danger. Demonic powers and death itself are manifestations of chaos, in opposition to which Jesus is a 'new creation' figure who restores life and order. Jesus' preaching, healing and exorcistic activities all 'draw people from a course which is opposed to God, and hence chaotic, and place them in alignment to God'.<sup>91</sup> Thus the metaphor represents the rescue of people from the forces of chaos and darkness; the task is the salvation of humanity, a task that the disciples will be sharing with Jesus himself.

A similar interpretation issues from Scott Spencer's consideration of the political implications of the metaphor: in total contrast to Herod Antipas's control of the economics of the Galilean fishing industry, Jesus calls people to an alternative kingdom in which the 'catch' is not killed but fed, healed, exorcised and restored; such is the 'good news' of this kingdom.<sup>92</sup>

Although the 'fishing' metaphor is not taken up explicitly in the subsequent text, and although the disciples seem not to understand the import of their ministry or of Jesus' ministry, the metaphor graphically depicts this ministry. It seems very reasonable to assume, with Shiner, that the audience would understand the content of the metaphor from their own knowledge of the post-Easter activity of the disciples: just as Jesus' calling of his disciples can be seen as 'fishing for people', so can the disciples' later missionary activity.<sup>93</sup> Jesus commissions them in 6:7-13; they go out

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<sup>90</sup> D. Rudman, "The Significance of the Phrase 'Fishers of Men' in the Synoptic Gospels," *IBS* 26 (2005): 112. Rudman's study expands the perspective of Jindřich Mánek, "Fishers of Men," *NovT* 2 (1957): 138-41.

<sup>91</sup> Rudman, "'Fishers of Men'," 117.

<sup>92</sup> F. Scott Spencer, "'Follow Me': The Imperious Call of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels," *Interpretation* 59 (2005): 143-46.

<sup>93</sup> Shiner, *Follow Me!* 175-6.

preaching repentance, healing and casting out demons, thus (partially, for the time being) fulfilling his prediction that he will make them ‘fishers’.

In regard to the Gerasene demoniac, then, the audience, having already heard how Jesus has restored a leper, a paralytic, many sick people and other demoniacs, is well prepared to view the demoniac as another ‘fish’ rescued from the powers of darkness,<sup>94</sup> with the demons suffering the opposite fate: destruction in the sea.<sup>95</sup> The reader may then legitimately infer that the demoniac himself becomes a ‘fisher of men’ through his proclamation in the Decapolis (5:20).

### **Mark 5:1-20 and discipleship sayings**

The discipleship theme takes a new turn when the audience encounters Jesus’ discipleship teaching in 8:34-38. From the beginning of the Gospel through to 8:30, Jesus calls his audience to follow him. After this, however, they see that discipleship also includes ‘denying themselves’, ‘losing their lives’ and ‘taking up the cross’. Joel Williams draws attention to the pivotal nature of this teaching: it ‘opens up new possibilities for the reader’s identification with the characters’ because the call to follow Jesus is now (in contrast to the particularity of the preceding material) open to all.<sup>96</sup> Looking back from this passage, can we distinguish any elements of this teaching in the story of the Gerasene demoniac? I suggest three:

First, Jesus sees discipleship as a matter of life and death: ‘Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s shall save it’ (8:35). The imagery of death is strong in the Gerasene story—tombs are

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<sup>94</sup> Marcus (*Mark 1–8*, 185) comments that, with the ‘nets of Belial’ in the background (CD 4:15-16) Jesus’ exorcisms can be seen as rescues.

<sup>95</sup> Spencer, “‘Follow Me’,” 146.

<sup>96</sup> Williams, *Other Followers*, 137. Mark McVann, “Reading Mark Ritually: Honor-Shame and the Ritual of Baptism,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 184–86, similarly argues for the centrality of this ‘great exhortation’ as the ‘literal, structural and symbolic centre, the pivot on which both halves of the Gospel narrative turn.’



mentioned three times. The quality of the demoniac's life is deathly—it has been described as 'a perpetual funeral rite...a continuous mourning ritual.'<sup>97</sup> Yet salvation is manifested—Jesus engineers a dramatic reversal in which the legion of demons perishes, the demoniac is resocialised and his life restored.

Second, there is an economic metaphor: 'What will one give in exchange for one's life?' (8:36). The loss of the gigantic herd of pigs is acknowledged as an economic disaster by many commentators, who see in this fact the major reason for the Gerasenes' rejection of Jesus.<sup>98</sup> Jesus has valued one man's life to be worth more than the lives of two thousand animals,<sup>99</sup> but 'the humanisation of one individual is too costly' for the Gerasenes,<sup>100</sup> whom the reader is able to judge as those who want to save their own lives.

Third, there is eschatological shame involved in rejecting Jesus: 'Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes...' (8:38). The destruction of the demonised pigs, viewed in the light of Jesus' 'strong man' saying (3:27), is surely a graphic representation of Jesus' triumph over Satan and all evil forces. As such, it has an eschatological import for the reader—like the 'shame' saying (8:38), it is a warning of what will ultimately happen to those who, like the Gerasenes, are offended by Jesus and oppose him.

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<sup>97</sup> Mark McVann, "Destroying Death: Jesus in Mark and Joseph in *The Sin Eater*," in *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, ed. Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 126–27.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Franz-J. Leenhardt, "An Exegetical Essay: Mark 5:1–20," in *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis: Interpretational Essays*, ed. Roland Barthes, trans. Alfred M. Johnson Jr. (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 85–109.

<sup>99</sup> Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 183, who cites Jerome and Chrysostom.

<sup>100</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering*, 119.

### Mark 5:1-20 and the 'secrecy motif'

A significant question is raised by the ending of the Gerasene pericope (5:18-20): how does Jesus' command that the ex-demoniac should 'go and tell' cohere with Jesus' many prohibitions of similar proclamation in the Gospel?

In three places Mark mentions that Jesus silences demons 'because they know who he is' (1:25, 34; 3:12). On three occasions Jesus commands silence regarding his healings of the leper (1:44), the daughter of Jairus (5:43) and the deaf mute (7:36). In addition, Jesus' command to the blind man, 'Do not even enter the village' (8:26) has a similar ring, and seems calculated to avoid publicity. Later Jesus commands his disciples not to reveal that he is Χριστός (8:30) nor what they have seen of his metamorphosis (9:9). These commands to silence have generally been seen as key elements of a 'secrecy motif' (formerly dubbed the 'messianic secret') in Mark's Gospel.

A broader view of the 'secrecy motif' would include other elements such as the privacy of Jesus' instructions to the disciples (4:10, 34; 7:17; 9:2, 28, 33; 13:3), the 'hiddenness' of the parabolic teaching (4:9-13, 33-34), his use of the enigmatic self-designation 'Son of Man', Jesus' attempts to conceal his presence from the public (6:31-32; 7:24; 9:30-31), and his desire to be alone to pray and to minister privately (1:35; 1:45; 7:33; 5:37; 6:46) although, of course, he cannot always avoid the crowds (1:45; 6:33-34; 7:24-25). Sometimes the disciples' failure to understand is seen as an aspect of the motif. However, these elements are of a different kind from those that specifically command silence. As Räisänen rightly concludes, the 'secrecy motif' is better seen as a conglomeration of different motifs, each serving potentially different purposes.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Heikki Räisänen, *The 'Messianic Secret' in Mark's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).



Of the commands to silence, two are addressed to the disciples. They are separate incidents, each with unique characteristics. The one at 8:30, where Jesus warns the disciples not to tell anyone about him, clearly refers to his identity as Χριστός, and is the clearest case of the ‘messianic secret’. Mark has identified Jesus as the Christ in his opening statement (1:1) but what awaits full disclosure in the story is *what kind* of Messiah he is. Taking into account the military and revolutionary implications of the messianic role, it is widely accepted that Mark seeks to redefine ‘Messiah’ and other christological titles in the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection: he is a *suffering* Messiah who is also God’s chosen son.<sup>102</sup> The other command to silence comes after Jesus’ ‘transfiguration’ on the mountain (9:9). With its specific mention of the resurrection, the idea behind this prohibition seems to be that Jesus’ messiahship, demonstrated by the glory of his metamorphosis, cannot be fully proclaimed until Easter—only then will the story be told, because only then will it be comprehensible.<sup>103</sup> A similar rationale may underlie the command to silence in 5:43—the raising of the girl is a foreshadowing of the resurrection in that it demonstrates a ‘premature’ application of resurrection power.<sup>104</sup>

Three commands to silence are addressed to demonic spirits. Their correct identification of Jesus certainly furthers Mark’s christological agenda for the audience at the discourse level. However, the demons, by their cries, have radically dissociated themselves from Jesus, and so, at the story level, they are silenced. They are denied the privilege of publicly proclaiming the ‘good news’—this is the task of the human witnesses. In the Gerasene exorcism, however, Jesus does not silence the

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<sup>102</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 28–29. See also Evans, *Mark*, 15, and Christopher Tuckett, “The Disciples and the Messianic Secret in Mark,” in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity*, ed. Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett, and Kari Syreeni (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 145–47.

<sup>103</sup> Evans, *Mark*, 42.

<sup>104</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 373.

demons' confession that he is Son of God (5:7). This may be because, in contrast with previous interactions with demons, this meeting with Legion is private. No witnesses are mentioned at this stage in the story, although we may assume the presence of at least some disciples who already have considerable experience of Jesus' exorcisms, and so any prohibition is unnecessary.

Four commands to silence (one being only implied) are addressed to humans, in both Jewish and Gentile (7:36) settings. All of them are given in private. We may note, then, that in private settings, demons are not silenced, but humans are. The rationale for such commands is usually explained thus: many of the secrecy commands (though not necessarily all) are redactional—Mark inserts them into the story even though they may appear rather difficult to understand, especially in the case of the resurrection of the dead girl (5:43)! Jesus must not be perceived and proclaimed merely as a miracle worker, because the miracles testify only in part to who Jesus is.<sup>105</sup> The usual form and function of miracle stories in early Christian and Greco-Roman literature is to elicit 'applause' for the miracle-worker. Mark wants to make it clear that such applause is insufficient for discipleship, and that what is necessary and more difficult is to follow Jesus in *suffering* discipleship to the cross. For this reason Mark manipulates the form, 'bends the genre' and 'stifles the applause' by using the 'secrecy motif'.<sup>106</sup> (The irony, however, will not be lost on the audience who already know who Jesus is.) Additionally, the 'secrecy motif' seems necessary in order to balance the considerable combined weight of the stories in which Jesus' identity is openly confessed by demons, God, Peter and Mark himself; all these positive affirmations could overwhelm the expressions of opposition to Jesus in the Gospel, rendering Jesus' crucifixion less credible.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 59–60; Tuckett, "Disciples," 149; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 525–26.

<sup>106</sup> Marvin Meyer, "Taking Up the Cross and Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 233.

<sup>107</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 527.



On two of the four occasions when Jesus' prohibitions are addressed to those healed, they are disregarded: the leper proclaims the miracle (κηρύσσω, 1:45) and the witnesses of the deaf mute's healing also proclaim it extravagantly (κηρύσσω, 7:36).<sup>108</sup> The 'secret' is abrogated in both Jewish and Gentile contexts. The message goes out in spite of Jesus' commands to silence. The inherent power of the narrative of Jesus' deeds, at both the historical level and the redactional level, explains why the commands are not always kept.<sup>109</sup>

It is important to note that there are at least eleven occasions when there is *no* command to silence. When the demons are silenced, the people are not. There is no silencing after the healings of the paralysed man (2:11, 12), the haemorrhaging woman (5:34), the healings of 6:53-56, or after the feeding miracles. All of these events occur openly in public, like the healing of the man with the withered hand (3:1-5); on the latter occasion at least, a command to silence would be inappropriate, because the Pharisees witness the healing and begin to plot against Jesus. Conversely, the disciples are sent out expressly to proclaim the kingdom, to exorcise and to heal (6:7-13). Mark's overall thrust, then, is to narrate the permission and encouragement of public proclamation rather than silence about who Jesus is and what he does.

The story of the Gerasene demoniac coheres with this thrust. Jesus sends him to go and testify to his family (5:18-20). Like the leper and the attendants of the deaf mute, he begins to proclaim (κηρύσσω) his healing widely. But unlike them, he breaks no command to silence. There is no command to silence here because, although the exorcism has been private, its consequences have become public: there

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<sup>108</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 151, says that this group is the first to 'publicly recognise Jesus as a potential Messiah figure'. However, their approbation in 7:37 ('He has done everything well! He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!') may not be a conscious allusion to Isa 35:5-6, or it may even be Mark's own ironic interpolation. As with the Isaianic allusions in 5:3-5, the implications will be apprehended by some in Mark's audience.

<sup>109</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 527.

are Gerasene witnesses present, waiting for Jesus to ‘shove off’. Mark’s narration here is consistent with the pattern that, in public settings, demons are silenced, but humans are not. The demoniac is free to demonstrate his discipleship by testifying to the power of Jesus in his life. He therefore functions as a model of discipleship and proclamation of the ‘good news’.

### **Mark 5:1-20 in the rhetoric of discipleship**

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be seen that the Gerasene demoniac story contributes to Mark’s rhetoric of discipleship and proclamation in at least five ways:

- (a) The episode promotes the kingdom of God through the man’s implicit repentance and belief, and through Jesus’ conquest of a large contingent of demons.
- (b) The ‘good news’ includes the possibility of liberation from bondage to the demonic through the authority of Jesus.
- (c) The demoniac, having experienced a significant aspect of salvation, becomes a model of discipleship and proclamation of the ‘good news’.
- (d) The story demonstrates that the ‘good news’ is for Gentiles as well as Jews.
- (e) The story foreshadows and exemplifies elements of Jesus’ discipleship teaching later in the Gospel. Through association with this teaching, audiences may realise that discipleship is a matter of life and death, and carries economic and eschatological consequences.



#### 4.5 Mark 5:1-20 and resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus is mentioned several times in the Gospel.<sup>110</sup> It is predicted by Jesus himself (ἀνίστημι, 8:31; 9:31; 10:34) and referred to also in 9:9-10 (ἀνίστημι). At the close of the Gospel, Jesus is said to have risen from the dead (ἐγείρω, 16:6). Earlier in the Gospel many people, including Herod, consider that Jesus may be John the Baptist risen from death (ἐγείρω, 6:14-16). The subject of resurrection is discussed by Jesus and the Sadducees (ἀνίστημι, 12:25, with ἐγείρω, 12:26).<sup>111</sup> However, some features of three miracle stories also evoke the theme of resurrection. The first is 1:29-31, in which Jesus raises Peter's mother-in-law from a fever (ἐγείρω, 1:31). The second is 5:36-43, in which Jesus raises a dead girl (ἐγείρω, 5:36, with ἀνίστημι, 5:42). The second is 9:14-29, in which Jesus raises a boy whom he has just exorcised (ἐγείρω with ἀνίστημι, 9:27). By this use of vocabulary Mark seems to link the raising of Jesus with the raising of sick and dead humans, implying that the same eschatological power is effectual in both.<sup>112</sup>

Since the Gerasene demoniac is never actually dead in the story, words for 'raising' and 'resurrection' are not used in relation to his restoration.<sup>113</sup> However, several commentators have suggested that the story nevertheless alludes to resurrection. In investigating this claim we need first to consider the work of Mark McVann.

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<sup>110</sup> For a recent treatment of the theme of resurrection in Mark's Gospel see Paul M. Fullmer, *Resurrection in Mark's Literary-Historical Perspective* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). Fullmer traces the theme of death and revival in both secular Greek epic and Hebrew prophetic literature.

<sup>111</sup> Fullmer, *Resurrection*, 190–91, sees this discussion of resurrection as the central element of a chiastic structure encompassing 11:17–12:44.

<sup>112</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 373.

<sup>113</sup> Fullmer, *Resurrection*, e.g., does not recognise any resurrection theme in 5:1-20.

### Death to life in Mark 5:1-20

McVann's extensive studies on the Gerasene pericope are set in the literary context of the four miracle stories comprising 4:35-5:43, which he calls the 'sea cycle'.<sup>114</sup> In the first story (4:35-41) Jesus attempts to cross a major boundary (the sea), and the power of death, represented by the storm, attempts to thwart him. In the third story Jesus raises Jairus's daughter from death (5:21-24; 35-43), and in the fourth (5:25-34) heals the haemorrhaging woman, who, as permanently unclean, was 'as good as dead'. McVann notes that in each of these four stories 'a boundary between death and life is crossed'. The Gerasene demoniac story (5:1-20) is the second in the 'cycle'. McVann views the demoniac's constant crying out and stoning of himself as elements of a 'perpetual funeral rite': he is outside of society, 'dead' to the community. Then, meeting Jesus, the man is transformed into 'new life from the tomb'.<sup>115</sup> McVann makes much of what he calls 'liminality'—the condition of being 'at the threshold', on the boundary between states, or in a process of change. The characters whom Jesus transforms in this 'cycle' are all in liminal situations; Jesus mediates in all three characters' passage from death to life.

In all of this McVann sees baptismal significance,<sup>116</sup> which seems to me to be an over-interpretation.<sup>117</sup> However, it is a legitimate insight that in all four of these stories Jesus transforms death (of various kinds) into life. Such a theme is coherent

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<sup>114</sup> Mark McVann, "Baptism, Miracles and Boundary Jumping in Mark," *BTB* 21 (1991): 151–7, and McVann, "Destroying Death".

<sup>115</sup> McVann, "Destroying Death," 126–7.

<sup>116</sup> McVann, "Baptism".

<sup>117</sup> The basis for McVann's hermeneutics is found in his doctoral dissertation (McVann, "Dwelling"). Drawing on the approach of the anthropologist Victor Turner, he argues that the 'sea cycle' may be read as dramatic sketches of the church, with the minor characters being viewed as symbolic of the church's preaching, confession and baptism (McVann, "Dwelling," 133–34; McVann, "Reading Mark Ritually"). For McVann, the text's 'symbolic value, not its historical facticity' (which, by the way, he does not deny) is the main interest ("Dwelling", 174). However, such a symbolic reading of the Gospel (McVann, "Baptism," 153–54) seems to me to impose features on the text, rather than to identify features that flow naturally *from* the text. As I have shown, Mark's strategies for guidance of the readers' transformation are much more diverse than a narrow focus on baptism, to which there is no explicit reference in the stories.



with material that comes both before and after the ‘cycle’: Jesus has been in the business of restoration all along, healing, exorcising, being the ‘physician’ (2:17). He will himself rise from death (the passion predictions and the words at the Last Supper all link death with future life) and this will be reflected in the experience of disciples who, in losing their life, save it (8:35). In this light, McVann is correct to conclude that this ‘cycle’ of stories presents Jesus as the one who has ultimate power over death and its envoys. ‘He is the source of life which shatters death in any form it may take’.<sup>118</sup> The demoniac story, then, in linkage with the stories on either side of it, plays a crucial role in highlighting this ‘death to life’ theme.

McVann goes further, however, claiming that Mark 5:1-20 ‘prefigures the resurrection of Jesus, in that the Gerasene, like Jesus, comes forth to new life from the tomb’.<sup>119</sup> McVann then cites Derrett’s assertion that ‘it is a resurrection scene’.<sup>120</sup> These two scholars are not the only ones to have seen a resurrection motif in this passage.<sup>121</sup> Is this view sustainable?

### **Echoes of resurrection in Mark 5:1-20**

Comparing the story with the resurrection narrative in 16:1-8, we notice several possible points of connection:

The man lives among tombs (5:2, 3, 5), and Jesus is put in a tomb (15:46; 16:3).  
 Jesus releases the man from demons (5:15), and Jesus is released from death (16:6).  
 Both the man (5:19) and the women (16:7) are told to ‘go (ὑπάγω) and tell’.

These parallels seem to suggest that the Gerasene demoniac’s restoration may point forward to the resurrection of Jesus. The demoniac, emerging from the

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<sup>118</sup> McVann, “Dwelling,” 153.

<sup>119</sup> McVann, “Destroying Death,” 126. For McVann, the death-resurrection metaphor actually generates the Gospel as a whole; the death and resurrection of Jesus reverberates backwards through the Gospel to shape and interpret the earlier narratives, particularly those in Mark 4 and 5.

<sup>120</sup> Derrett, “Legend,” 68.

<sup>121</sup> James M. Robinson, *Problem*, 39, suggests that the sudden reversal of Jesus’ passion to resurrection is anticipated in the exorcism stories, especially in the Gerasene exorcism, where it appears that ‘violence and death itself have been cast out’.

tombs, is released from the bondage of a living death, as Jesus is to be liberated from a tomb which is not his own.<sup>122</sup> The demoniac also parallels Jesus in that Jesus himself had been accused as a madman (3:21) and as a demoniac (3:22). In addition, just as the Gerasene demoniac had been bound (δέω, 5:3, 4), Jesus himself was to be bound (δέω, 15:1), his body abused (scourged, 15:15) and left in an ‘unclean’ place amongst tombs. He also would cry out incomprehensibly (15:34, 37).<sup>123</sup>

Luke T. Johnson adds a further parallel between the Gerasene story and the resurrection narrative: having been (presumably) naked, the man becomes clothed and seated (5:15); in the resurrection scene a young man, previously naked (14:51-52) is clothed and seated (16:5).<sup>124</sup> I will leave aside the controversy as to whether the νεανίσκος of 14:51 is the same young man as that at the empty tomb.<sup>125</sup> Even if he is, the case for parallelism with the Gerasene demoniac is rather weak, for two reasons. First, though both scenes have καθήμενος (‘seated’), different words for ‘clothed’ are used. Second, the emphasis at the empty tomb is on the whiteness of the clothes, a detail that links more substantially with the transfiguration scene in which Jesus’ clothes become dazzlingly white (9:3). However, Johnson is correct in pointing out that the ‘openness’ of Mark’s ending ‘forces us to reconsider all his story’: readers who ‘return to Galilee’ (16:7) and re-read the stories in the light of the resurrection find that proclamation of the ‘good news’ is continued by ‘those

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<sup>122</sup> John Bligh, “The Gerasene Demoniac and the Resurrection of Christ,” *CBQ* 31 (1969): 387. Bligh suggests the parallels mentioned, and other connections that are, in my view, much weaker (e.g., the name ‘Legion’, linking to the Roman presence at Jesus’ tomb). He notes that both Mark and Matthew pay scant attention to any relationship the miracle stories and the resurrection account may once have had. This probably means that Mark does not *intend* the story to have any resurrection symbolism.

<sup>123</sup> N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2001), 56.

<sup>124</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *Writings*, 168–69.

<sup>125</sup> Although νεανίσκος and περιβεβλημένος (‘clothed’) are used in both scenes, many commentators take the ‘young man’ as an angel. E.g., Nineham (*Gospel*, 444) cites 2 Macc 3:26, 33 for ‘young man’ as an angelic being. For arguments against this, and a full discussion of the problem, see Robin Scroggs and Kent I. Groff, “Baptism in Mark: Dying and Rising with Christ,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 533–36.



who have come to be “in their right minds” (5:15) by knowing that the Stronger One lives’.<sup>126</sup>

‘Resurrection’ seen as ‘a re-emergence of the individual from chaos’<sup>127</sup> is a scenario that fits both the demoniac and Jesus. For the demoniac who lives among the dead (the ‘non-community’), salvation includes restoration to the community—a ‘resurrection’ from the dead.<sup>128</sup> To use the musical analogy again, the theme of resurrection in Mark’s Gospel is like that of the *Enigma Variations* in that it is ‘hidden’, that is, not directly presented in all its occurrences. In the Gerasene demoniac pericope it can be heard softly but powerfully. Its subtle rhetorical force enables the audience to entertain the possibility that they may participate in Jesus’ ultimate power over death, with the result that they may experience liberation from bondage into a new life of freedom.

## Conclusions

It is time now to assess the rhetorical impact of Mark 5:1-20 and its demoniac. At this point it is important to note that what Mark’s Gospel has to say about perception, purity and discipleship has its foundation in an apocalyptic perspective that envisions a new world order. Whether the audience understands Jesus depends on their reception of the spoken and performed word; their acceptance of him (according to the programmatic parable of the sower) is opposed by Satan (4:15), while the ‘unclean spirits’, although they must identify him correctly, also stand in opposition to him. This perspective also dominates Mark’s rhetoric of purity, in which the ‘unclean’ and the defiled battle against the ‘clean’ and the holy of the newly-revealed kingdom of God. This is the burden, too, of the proclamation of the

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<sup>126</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *Writings*, 169.

<sup>127</sup> Rudman, “‘Fishers of Men’,” 116. For Rudman, ‘chaos’ denotes those ‘anti-creational forces’ that ‘disrupt the order that Yahweh has intended for the world’ (109-110).

<sup>128</sup> Watson, *Text*, 248.

εὐαγγέλιον: the kingdom is near, and it is time for μετάνοια (1:15) which must result in a life of discipleship. The resurrection motif powerfully underlines this apocalyptic perspective.

The story in 5:1-20 seems to function as a particularly graphic expression of this perspective. It dramatically conveys ‘the promise of God’s ability to defeat and re-order the disordered powers that afflict both individuals and communities.’<sup>129</sup> As the central exorcism in the Gospel, the story is simultaneously an illustration and archetype of the coming kingdom—the transformation of the cosmic order.<sup>130</sup>

As for the demoniac himself, the 5th century commentator Peter Chrysologus sees him as a paradigm of distorted humanity:

What has become of the glory of humanity made in the image of God? In the person of the demoniac, humanity seems to have fallen to the depths under the power of the demonic.<sup>131</sup>

If the demoniac, in his initial state, can be seen as a paradigm of the ‘human predicament’, can he not also be seen, in his transformed condition, as a paradigm of a restored, transformed humanity? Attention has already been drawn to the considerable extent to which the audience may identify with him. The healed man certainly models a positive response to Jesus that issues in discipleship and proclamation of the ‘good news’. Readers will also see in him, more than anywhere else in the Gospel, a pattern for their own liberation from bondage to evil and impurity. He is also one of the Gospel’s important examples of the inclusion and reintegration of outcasts. Francis Watson appropriately asserts that this story must be read

(1) as a believing testimony to the fact that Jesus transformed concrete, particular human relations, and (2) as a testimony to the significance of this fact, which is that the universal,

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<sup>129</sup> John, *Meaning*, 91.

<sup>130</sup> Christian Strecker, “Jesus and the Demoniacs,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 127–28.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 67, paraphrasing Peter Chrysologus.



eschatological transformation and perfection of human relations is the goal towards which Jesus' activity is oriented.<sup>132</sup>

I conclude, therefore, that the Gerasene demoniac story is a very significant component of the Gospel's rhetoric of transformation, and is in many ways potentially transformative for its audience. Many elements of the story are foreshadowed in the preceding sections, so that within the pericope many hints materialise. Themes overlap and soundings go out to be echoed later. The demoniac himself, as a character, is a figure in which the transforming activity of Jesus is dramatically and evidentially at work. He, of all Mark's 'minor' characters, typifies most closely the dynamics of Mark's theological anthropology.

Marcus writes that '[Mark unmasks] the cosmic forces behind acceptance and rejection of the word. The victory Jesus wins is cosmic, one that changes forever the universe in which all human beings live'.<sup>133</sup> This changed perspective includes also a transformed vision of humanity.

It is appropriate now to 'stand back' and to attempt to discern the shape of the theological anthropology of the Gospel. In other words, having taken a broad view of Mark's 'transformative discourse' (Chapter 2) and having established some ways in which the pericope 5:1-20 functions to promote Mark's rhetorical purpose (Chapters 3 and 4), I now ask, What implications about the nature and destiny of humans can be drawn from the kinds of transformation that Mark's Gospel advocates? The next chapter addresses this question.

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<sup>132</sup> Watson, *Text*, 252.

<sup>133</sup> Marcus, *Mystery*, 64, 230.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF MARK'S GOSPEL

#### Introduction

In Chapter 1 Mark's Gospel was introduced as an appropriate source of an early Christian theological anthropology. I gave notice there that such an anthropology would be implicit (because Mark shows no interest in anthropology for its own sake) and dynamic (because Mark's interest is in transformation). This possibility of transformation appears to govern his rhetoric. The rhetorical elements used by Mark to promote specific kinds of transformation in his audience were analysed in Chapter 2. The story of the Gerasene demoniac then provided a case study, and I analysed the characteristics that provide its rhetorical force, both in isolation (Chapter 3) and in the literary context of the Gospel (Chapter 4).

I found that Mark's story of the Gerasene demoniac plays a significant part in the process by which Mark's rhetoric urges the transformation of his audience. He highlights the necessity for a correct perception of Jesus—a perception that seems, however, to be unavailable to some characters in the story. Many of those who do perceive Jesus correctly enter into (or are drawn into) a relationship with him, characterised as discipleship. For many of these characters, and for the demoniac in particular, their encounter with Jesus brings liberation from bondage and a new kind of life analogous in some respects to resurrection. In Chapter 6 I will consider how this might happen in the experience of readers. In the present chapter, though, I embark on a somewhat different task: I return to the concern of Chapter 1, the dynamic theological anthropology embedded in the Gospel, attempting to elucidate this in a synthetic fashion.



## 5.1 Mark's anthropology: a construction

I have argued that Mark aims to move his readers to or through a process of radical transformation that will have both personal and social manifestations. The narrative not only depicts characters making transitions from one position to another, but it also attempts to persuade the reader to do likewise. By means of his literary and rhetorical techniques, which include his use of the words of Jesus, Mark exerts pressure on the reader to change. Analysis and synthesis of these aspects of the Gospel enable us to form an overall conception of Mark's view of the human person. This constitutes a coherent theological anthropology, and approximates, in effect, to a construction of Mark's 'model reader'—one who will receive the 'good news' gladly and respond whole-heartedly in a manner congruent with Jesus' words and example.

### The 'model reader'

Critics have interpreted the ambiguous concept of the 'implied reader' in different ways. Fowler takes it to mean the 'reader implied *in the text*'<sup>1</sup> rather than the 'text transcendent' reader more commonly appropriated by reader-response critics.<sup>2</sup> What I wish to identify (and characterise as an anthropological model) is the implied reader who, according to Mark's (hypothetical) vision, will embrace the message of his Gospel, have faith in Jesus as the Son of God and become a disciple. I wanted to call this reader the 'ideal reader' until I discovered that the term is too ambiguous. Although it is still used by Rhoads interchangeably with 'implied reader',<sup>3</sup> the term 'ideal reader' is applied more specifically by reader-response critics to those

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Fowler, "Who is 'the Reader' of Mark's Gospel?" *SBL Seminar Papers* 22 (1983): 45.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley E. Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?" 280.

<sup>3</sup> Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story (2nd Ed.)*, 137–38.

informed readers who have linguistic, literary and critical competence—that is, the critics themselves.<sup>4</sup> The readers I wish to specify have, to some extent, some of these characteristics: they are accustomed to the language of their time and place, they are able to appreciate the intertextuality of the material, and able to identify rhetorical and performance markers, and so on, but they are ‘pre-critical’ in that the author does not expect them to stand ‘over the text’ to judge it.

A better term, therefore, is that used by Umberto Eco: the ‘model reader’. This reader is, of course, a construct of the author—a *persona* who is ‘able to deal interpretively with the expressions [of the text] in the same way as the author deals generatively with them’,<sup>5</sup> who responds to the text just as the author would want. The ‘model reader’ is ‘the reader the text invites us to be’.<sup>6</sup> It is ‘the reader we have to be willing to become in order to bring the reading experience to its full measure’.<sup>7</sup> Since the text of Mark’s Gospel invites its readers to be transformed, a characterisation of its ‘model reader’ is tantamount to an identification of Mark’s vision of the transformed eschatological *anthrōpos*, whom Mark hopes will be embodied by real flesh and blood readers. It is important to keep in mind that, although the ‘model reader’ is a construct, it is a construct of a *first-century* reader.

### **Transformation: from distortion to restoration**

How is the ‘model reader’ to be transformed? Transformation implies a movement from one ‘pole’ of existence to another. Any attempt to examine the process must identify the ‘poles’ that represent ‘before’ and ‘after’. Mark himself is entirely non-systematic about this, and his worldview must be deduced from the content and the

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<sup>4</sup> Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’?” 46–47.

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7, as quoted by Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’?” 39.

<sup>7</sup> Willem S. Vorster, “The Reader in the Text: Narrative Material,” *Semeia* 48 (1989): 25.



rhetoric of his narrative. We find, in fact, that each ‘pole’ is presented in the Gospel in a variety of ways and with complex descriptors. In order to clarify the dynamics of transformation from one to the other I have borrowed Alistair McFadyen’s terms, ‘distortion’ and ‘restoration’.<sup>8</sup> As I will show, these categories are not inappropriate hermeneutical impositions on the material, but rather reflect an anthropological perspective that is familiar from the Hebrew scriptures,<sup>9</sup> firmly grounded in the text of the Gospel itself, and shared by other NT writers.<sup>10</sup> McFadyen submits that humanity is created by God for a life of relationship and dialogue-partnership, but in human experience both identity and relationship are corrupted and fractured; however, God has opened new possibilities for redeemed and restored identity and relationship.<sup>11</sup> In the NT, this perspective finds its fullest expression in the theology of Paul, but I will argue that distortion and restoration are fundamental components of the narrative grammar of Mark’s Gospel; they are woven into his narrative structure and, in fact, comprise its ‘core message’. I begin with a survey of Mark’s anthropological terms.

## 5.2 Mark’s anthropological language

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<sup>8</sup> Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Israel needs YHWH as its redeemer (לְחַלּוֹץ, ῥυσάμενος), to restore (כִּיפּוֹ, ἐπιστρέφω) and bring salvation (יְשׁוּעָה, σωτηρία) (Isa 49:6-8).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Hos 1:10 is quoted by both Paul (Rom 9:25) and Peter (1 Pet 2:10): ‘You once were not a people, but now you are the people of God.’

<sup>11</sup> McFadyen, *Call*, 18–20, 39–44.

Mark uses a variety of words that have anthropological content. Because these words have been well studied and are common to the other Gospels and other New Testament literature, I will merely sketch the outlines of their significance here, while indicating any distinctive Markan usage.

### *Anthrōpos*

The only word available in Greek for the concept of ‘human being’ was ἄνθρωπος.<sup>12</sup> Mark uses this word 56 times. Of these, 14 refer to the Son of Man, and 11 refer to particular characters. Most other occurrences refer, in the singular, to generalised individuals (some in the sense of ‘whoever’) or, in the plural, to people in general.<sup>13</sup> Only two (both in 2:27) refer to humankind as the generic, universal *anthrōpos* for whom the sabbath is made. Mark refers to humanity in this sense in 13:20, using the expression πᾶσα σὰρξ (‘all flesh’), a Semitic idiom (כָּל־בָּשָׂר, e.g., Dt 5:6; Isa 40:5).

### **The physical body and the senses**

Mark makes conventional use of σῶμα (body, 4 times)<sup>14</sup> and σὰρξ (flesh, 3 times). , Referring to Genesis 2:24, Jesus says that a man and a woman become ‘one flesh’ (10:8); this expression symbolises the indissoluble union of a husband and a wife whom God has joined together in marriage (10:9). The expression ‘all flesh’ (13:20) has been referred to above. In 14:38 Jesus says, ‘The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’. This dichotomy of the flesh and the spirit reflects earlier expressions such as

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<sup>12</sup> Gill, *The Person and the Human Mind*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Son of Man: 2:10; 2:28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 (x2), 41, 62.  
Particular characters: 1:23; 3:1, 3, 5; 5:2, 8; 12:1; 13:34; 14:13, 71; 15:39. Humankind: 2:27 (x2).

A generalised individual: 4:26; 7:11, 15 (x3), 18, 22 (x2), 23; 8:36, 37; 10:7, 9; 14:21 (x2).

People in general: 1:17; 3:28; 7:7, 8, 21; 8:24, 27, 33; 9:31; 10:27; 11:2, 30, 32; 12:14.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus’ body in 14:8, 22; 15:43; a woman’s body in 5:29.



Isaiah 31:3 and 40:6-8. The word carries a feeling of humanity's mortality, physical frailty and moral fragility.<sup>15</sup>

Mark apparently has little interest in using sensory language to enhance his audience's experience of the narrative, since he appears to have missed many opportunities to do so.<sup>16</sup> However, as I have already shown, Mark makes much metaphorical use of the vocabulary of seeing and hearing.

### **The spirit**

Mark uses the word πνεῦμα 22 times. Six of these refer to the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> 'Unclean' spirits are referred to 13 times. Jesus' spirit, the location of his knowledge and emotion, is referred to twice.<sup>18</sup> Only once does Mark refer to the distinctively human spirit: though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak (14:38). This saying evaluates the human spirit positively, yet the disciples' failure to 'watch and pray' demonstrates that the spirit, too, is weak and unable to regulate the flesh.

### **The heart and the mind**

Mark refers to the καρδιά 11 times. The hidden interiority of the heart (ἐσωθεν, within, 7:23) is contrasted with the exteriority of the stomach (7:19) and the lips (7:6), the latter reference being a quotation of Isaiah 29:13. The heart (לֵב) is the commonest and most important word in the vocabulary of Old Testament anthropology.<sup>19</sup> Mark's use of the term is conventional. The heart is the secret

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<sup>15</sup> The Pauline dichotomy, in which the 'flesh' and the 'spirit' refer to the temporal (eschatological) duality of old and new states of being, is absent here. Berger, *Identity*, 137.

<sup>16</sup> Hedrick, "Conceiving."

<sup>17</sup> Holy Spirit: 1:8, 10, 12; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11.

<sup>18</sup> Jesus' spirit: 2:8; 8:12.

<sup>19</sup> Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel—in the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 116. A standard work on Hebrew anthropological terms is Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). A more recent work that provides valuable additional material, including a feminist perspective, is Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

location of the thinking processes: the Pharisees are referred to as ‘thinking (διαλογίζομαι) in their hearts’ (2:6, 8). This construction seems parallel to the one that describes Jesus as ‘knowing in his spirit’ (2:8). The heart is also the seat of all kinds of evil (7:21-23), of doubt and faith (11:22, 23) and of love (12:30, 33). On four occasions Jesus attributes ‘hardness’ of heart to Pharisees (3:5; 10:5) and to his own disciples (6:52; 8:17). This concept of the ‘hardened heart’ will receive further attention below.

Klaus Berger’s important study of historical psychology warns that interpretations of the New Testament may be inappropriately coloured by modern psychological concepts. More specifically, he points out that none of the anthropological terms used by NT writers imply what we usually designate as the ‘unconscious’. The ‘heart’, for example, is not a particular component of the psyche, but stands for the aspects of a person that are invisible in the sense of not being accessible to public view.<sup>20</sup>

The terms *διάνοια* and *σύνεσις* are other expressions of interiority that signify the mind; both appear, apparently synonymously, in 12:30-33. They are used together with *καρδία*, *ψυχή* and *ἰσχύς* to indicate the totality of one’s response of love to God.<sup>21</sup> The use of *σωφρονοῦντα* (‘in his right mind’) in 5:15 draws attention to the rationality of the restored demoniac’s mind and implies a liberation from *μανία*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Berger, *Identity*, 20. See also his Chapter 5, ‘Interior and Exterior’, 70-81.

<sup>21</sup> If these terms in Mark’s Gospel have the same connotations as *νοῦς* does in Paul’s 1 Corinthians, (see Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized,” 756) then they themselves reflect the orientation of the whole self, whether toward God or away from God.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Acts 26:25, where the terms are opposed: Paul is not out of his mind (*μαίνομαι*) but speaks words which are true and rational (*σωφροσύνης*). See further Ulrich Luck, *TDNT* 7:1097-1104.



## *Psychē*

Mark uses ψυχή nine times. In 3:4 it refers generally to ‘life’ in the opposition ‘to save life or to kill’. The totality of particular human lives is indicated in 10:45 (the Son of Man gives his life as a ransom for many) and in 8:35 (the saving and losing of lives). A more specific meaning for ψυχή, however, seems warranted in 8:36 and 37—Jesus questions the wisdom of ‘gaining the whole world’ yet ‘forfeiting one’s ψυχή’, or of exchanging something for one’s ψυχή. Here the spiritual, eternal quality of one’s life (sometimes translated ‘soul’) is probably indicated. The injunction to love God with ‘the whole ψυχή’ is expressed in 12:30 and 33. Corresponding to the Hebrew נַפֶּשׁ (one’s life force, the seat of desires and affections) ψυχή here seems to denote one’s emotional orientation towards God.<sup>23</sup> Finally, in 14:34 Jesus refers to his ψυχή as the location of his deep grief; this usage recalls passages such as Psalm 42:1-5, with its address to the ψυχή ‘within me’. However, rather than conceiving of the ψυχή as one of the components of a person, it is more appropriate to see it as an expression of the person as a whole, or as the much-used Hebrew circumlocution for ‘I’.<sup>24</sup>

Taking these terms together, we can reconstruct, so far in very broad outline, a ‘Markan’ concept of the essential *anthrōpos*: the human person is corporeal, with faculties of sense perception; but weak and vulnerable to sickness and demonic invasion. Interiority is expressed in terms of spirit, heart, soul and mind; these overlapping designations indicate not (as in some modern conceptions) the ‘real person’, but the dynamic, hidden, non-public aspects of one’s thinking, knowing and feeling. Looking beyond these anthropological terms, however, we can gain further

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<sup>23</sup> George Keerankeri, *The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12:28–34*, *Analecta Biblica* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003), 37.

<sup>24</sup> Compare Luke 12:19-21, where it is clear that talking to one’s ψυχή (19) is talking to oneself (21).

insight into Mark's conception of humanity by considering his theology of creation and eschatology.

### 5.3 Mark's view of *anthrōpos* as created yet distorted

#### The creation of humanity

Mark's Jesus expresses a fundamental assumption of all the biblical writers, that humanity has been created by God. He refers briefly to the creation in 13:19—'the beginning of the creation which God created'. More specifically referring to humanity, and echoing Genesis 1:27, Jesus says, 'At the beginning of creation God made them male and female' (10:6). Jesus goes on to make the point that God's creation ordinance should not be interfered with, since it is more authoritative than Moses' law: 'What God has joined together let no man separate' (10:9). Further, the passage (10:2-9) implies that salvation restores human relationships to the initial ordering of the creation.<sup>25</sup>

Mark's only other reference that places humanity in the context of creation is 2:27—Jesus' assertion that 'the sabbath was made for people'. It is implied here that God's intention in creation was to promote the welfare of humanity. Jesus seems to mirror this intention in many ways. He extrapolates from this sabbath-creation principle to assert his own 'lordship of the sabbath' as the Son of Man (2:28). If 'son of man' in this passage has the same meaning as it does in its many other occurrences in Mark,<sup>26</sup> this self-designation not only identifies Jesus (previously designated Son of God) as Messiah and the Danielic (eschatological) Son of Man

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<sup>25</sup> See Bird, "Tearing," 48. Bird notes that Mark's is the only Gospel to use κτίσις.

<sup>26</sup> On this see Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 245–46, 531.



(14:61-62), but also clearly grants honour to *anthrōpos* by association: he is ‘not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters’ (Hebrews 2:11).

These propositions regarding creation set humanity distinctively apart as ‘other’ *vis-à-vis* God. More specifically, they place humanity in a derivative and subservient relation to God—a relation that is clearly implied in the expression βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Distance and difference between humans and God is represented at several points in Mark’s Gospel, and the prevailing sense of these is limitation, weakness and dependence. Six occurrences of the word *anthrōpos* place it in antithesis to God. In 7:7, 8 the commandment of God is placed over against ‘the precepts/tradition of men’, and in 8:33 ‘the things of God’ are placed over against ‘the things of men’. In 10:27 the limitations of humankind are noted: ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God.’ Finally, the discussion of Jesus with Jewish leaders in 11:27-33 deals with the question of Jesus’ (and John the Baptist’s) source of authority: is it ‘from heaven’ or ‘from men’? In all of these cases human thoughts and ways are no match for the authority and priority of the divine; the Gospel thus underlines the strong contrast between the creator and the created.

### **The weakness of humanity**

The dichotomy of divine strength and human weakness is, of course, already familiar from the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>27</sup> It also finds expression in Greek literature.<sup>28</sup> With weakness and inability comes susceptibility to sickness, the debilitating power of which is poignantly described in the case of the haemorrhaging woman (5:25, 26),

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<sup>27</sup> E.g., Ps 146:3-5; Isa 31:1-3; 55:9; Jer 17:5-7.

<sup>28</sup> Dio Chrysostom (4.29) makes the distinction between two kinds of education, one divine (θεία, δαιμόνιος) and the other human (ἀνθρωπίνη); the former is great and strong (μεγάλη καὶ ἰσχυρά) while the latter is small and weak (μικρὰ καὶ ἀσθενής) and ‘full of pitfalls and no little deception’.

but perhaps the most striking human limitation expressed in the Gospel is the difficulty with which people perceive: not all have ‘ears to hear’ (4:23).<sup>29</sup>

Susceptibility to demonic interference (Satan ‘takes away the word’) and failures to withstand the challenges life brings are also expressed in the parable of the sower and soils (4:15-19). Apart from the kind of power that Jesus demonstrates, humanity is vulnerable to oppression from demons. The weakness of humankind as ‘flesh’ has been referred to above. The episode narrating Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane (14:32-42) provides a telling commentary on the commandment to love God ‘with all one’s heart, *psychē*, mind and strength (ἰσχύς)’ (12:30-33), for in that setting the weakness of ‘flesh’ means that the disciples are not able (ἰσχύω, 14:37) to keep watch—‘their eyes were heavy’ (14:40). Neither had they been able (ἰσχύω, 9:18, 28) to drive out a demon. We recall that *no one* in the Gerasene situation was able (ἰσχύω, 5:3) to bind the demoniac. Mark thus provides a general statement regarding human weakness together with several illustrations of the principle.

The opposition ‘not you, but the Holy Spirit’ (13:11) confirms these various expressions of the insufficiency and inadequacy of the ‘merely human’ for Mark’s Jesus. However, this saying about the Holy Spirit notifies the audience that what is lacking on account of human limitation and weakness may be supplied by God.<sup>30</sup> Mark has shown, through the healing stories, that such divine intervention is transformative, not least in the case of the Gerasene demoniac.

### **The distortion of humanity**

Mark describes the plight of the Gerasene in terms much stronger than those of limitation and weakness. The man is a representation of humanity distorted. I will argue here that Mark’s (eschatological) view of humanity is predominantly negative,

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<sup>29</sup> See further Joel Marcus, “Mark 4:10–12 and Marcan Epistemology,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 562.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus’ reception of the Spirit at his baptism (1:10) also illustrates this human need for divine aid.



and that his 'good news' exerts its full rhetorical effect only through its provision of an eschatological remedy to these negative aspects. I have called these negative characteristics 'distortions' following McFadyen's use of the term.<sup>31</sup> I will first note some elements of distortion in the characters of the Gospel, then turn to Jesus' reported words and to the metaphors of blindness, deafness and the hardened heart. Of course, negative elements often appear together with indications of the possibility of restoration and transformation; for the sake of clarity these possibilities are considered later.

### **Distorted characters**

Two groups of characters in the Gospel demonstrate characteristics that the narrator interprets as distorted. First, the Jewish religious authorities are consistently shown as opponents of Jesus. Mark initially depicts their animosity without interpretation: they wonder about Jesus, watch him intently, accuse him and plot to kill him (2:6-8; 3:2-6, 22, 30). This group evokes in Jesus responses of anger and grief (3:5) and, later, 'groaning in his spirit' (12:8). Jesus labels them as 'hypocrites' (7:6; 12:15), who have forsaken and nullified the commandments of God (7:6), and as 'yeast' (8:15), citing their avoidance of the duty to show honour to parents (7:10-13). He tells a parable against them in which he identifies violence, shameful behaviour, murder, greed and rejection (12:1-12). He reveals their erroneous views (12:24, 27), and explicitly condemns their ostentation, honour-seeking and exploitation of the poor (12:38-40).

Mark's commentary becomes increasingly negative, exposing the authorities' fear of the people (11:18, 32; 12:12), their sly efforts to trap Jesus (12:13, 15; 14:1), their rejoicing at Jesus' betrayal (14:11), their enlistment of false testimony (14:55),

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<sup>31</sup> See above, p. 215.

their manipulation of the crowd (15:11) and finally their mocking of Jesus (15:31). Rhetorically, this progressively antagonistic portrayal of the authorities assists the audience to side with the protagonist Jesus. Its significance for theological anthropology, however, lies in the realisation that it is a portrayal of men in opposition both to God and to fellow humans, and that this opposition represents an inner corruption masked by outward displays of piety, authority and honour.

The disciples are the second group to serve as negative models. Although they participate at times in the ministry of Jesus (e.g., 6:7-13, 30-44), Jesus disapproves of the fear (4:40, 41; 6:50; 9:32), incomprehension (4:13; 8:17) and lack of faith (6:6; 4:40) that they exhibit. The disciples provoke Jesus' indignation and earn his rebuke. They forbid what Jesus permits (they do not receive children, 10:13-16), they trouble an innocent woman (14:5-6), they disobey Jesus' request to watch and pray (14:34-42), they desert Jesus and flee (14:50). Some disciples receive particular mention: James and John seek honour for themselves (10:35-37) and Judas betrays Jesus (14:10, 41-46). Peter is called 'Satan' because his thinking is merely human (8:33). His resolve never to deny Jesus, echoed by the other disciples (14:31), proves empty as he disowns Jesus and finally breaks down with weeping at his own faithlessness (14:66-72). Each of those whom Jesus has chosen to invest with his authority (3:13-19), and whom the audience would expect to be positive models, is shown to think and act in ways contrary to the ways approved by Jesus. Unlike the disciples, however, one man in the story acknowledges his lack of faith (9:24), and others—the friends of the paralytic (2:5), Jairus (5:23), the haemorrhaging woman (5:34), and Bartimaeus (10:52)—demonstrate considerable faith.

Rhetorically, the flawed responses of the disciples enable the audience to identify with the disciples, and challenge the audience to consider and evaluate their



own responses to Jesus. Danove neatly sums up this aspect:<sup>32</sup>

A constitutive element of Mark's mathetology is failure and the need for rehabilitation. The disciple on occasion fears or does not know and responds inappropriately or thinks erroneously and acts improperly; no disciple completely avoids such failures and the consequent need for rehabilitative thinking and acting.

The corollary of this statement would be (since Mark is addressing the audience as potential disciples) that human failure and the consequent need for rehabilitation are constitutive elements also of Mark's theological anthropology.

### **Jesus' anthropological references**

Some of Jesus' sayings have anthropological content that highlight negative aspects. He draws attention to a wide variety of human attitudes and actions that are apparently not in harmony with the kingdom of God, for he condemns them more or less strongly. Many of these have direct implications for relationships with both God and humans. The sins of the religious leaders have already been mentioned. Among others are blasphemy (3:28), greed (4:19), failure to give honour (6:3-6), self-interest (8:34-38; 9:33-34; 10:35-45), causing others to sin (9:42-48),<sup>33</sup> divorce (10:2-12), misuse of authority (10:42), robbery (11:17), deception (13:5, 22), rebellion and betrayal (13:12), hate (13:13) and violence.<sup>34</sup>

He refers to sin in general terms, with the possibility of forgiveness (2:5f; 3:28, 29; 4:12; 11:25). He refers to five of the sins listed in the 'ten commandments' (10:19), and provides a long list of thirteen 'evils' that come from within a person (7:21-23). This last passage comes close to being a formal statement of an anthropological principle: these many expressions of evil come 'out of the heart of

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<sup>32</sup> Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterisation*, 166.

<sup>33</sup> In the light of the fate of the legion of demons, it is interesting that the stated consequence of this sin is being 'cast into the sea' (9:42) which is analogous to 'unquenchable fire' (43, 48) and to 'hell' (45, 47), suggesting utter destruction.

<sup>34</sup> Jesus predicts the harsh treatment he will receive at the hands of rulers: rejection, betrayal, mocking, flogging, and murder (8:31; 9:31; 10:33); these things will also happen to Jesus' followers (13:9-13).

humans' (ἐκ τῆς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων). The implication is that human persons are, at their centre, fundamentally distorted.

Jesus' use of the phrase 'this generation' (ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη) is instructive.<sup>35</sup> Evald Lövestam demonstrates convincingly that in each of its four occurrences in Mark (as also in Matthew, Luke and Acts) the collective phrase alludes to 'the generation of the flood' (דור המבול) and 'the generation of the wilderness' (דור המדבר) in Israel's ancient stories.<sup>36</sup> Jewish references to these collectives do not stress their chronology (length of days and years) but the attitudes of their hearts and their relationship with God. The 'generation of the flood' is characterised by their corruption, and the 'generation of the wilderness' by their unbelief and mutinous behaviour.<sup>37</sup> However, these expressions are not inclusive of all people: Noah, Moses and Joshua are not counted as part of their 'generations', for they had a different spirit (Gen 6:9; Num 14:24).

In Mark, the Pharisees' demand for a sign (8:12) recalls the 'wilderness generation' (e.g., Num 14:22); Jesus is put to the test in the same way as God is put to the test in the Exodus wanderings.<sup>38</sup> Jesus' cry, 'O unbelieving generation' (9:19) responds to the lack of faith of the disciples and the crowd, and echoes Deuteronomy 32:20.<sup>39</sup> His question, 'How long shall I put up with you?' echoes Numbers 14:11,

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<sup>35</sup> 'Why does this generation [ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη] seek for a sign?' (8:12); 'in this adulterous and sinful generation' [ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ μοιχαλίδι καὶ ἀμαρτωλῷ] (8:38); 'O unbelieving generation' [ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος] (9:19); 'this generation [ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη] will not pass away' (13:30). The expression is used similarly by Paul in Phil 2:15 and by Peter in Acts 2:40.

<sup>36</sup> Evald Lövestam, *Jesus and 'This Generation'*, Coniectanea Biblica NT Series (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), 8–17.

<sup>37</sup> The 'generation of the wilderness' is described variously as wicked, perverse, crooked and mutinous in Dt 1:35; 32:5, 20; cf. Num 32:13; Ps 95:10. Later Jewish writings continue to refer to these 'generations', e.g., *m. Sanh.* 10:3 states that 'the *dor* of the Flood and the *dor* of the Wilderness have no portion in the future world, nor will they stand at the (last) judgement' (Lövestam, *This Generation*, 16).

<sup>38</sup> Lövestam, *This Generation*, 22–25. The Q material has other occurrences of the phrase (Mt 11:16–19, par. Lk 7:31–35).

<sup>39</sup> This is more explicit in the parallel Mt 17:20; prayer (9:29) implies faith.



27, and parallels God's warning of the withdrawal of his presence.<sup>40</sup> By naming the 'adulterous and sinful generation' (8:38) in an eschatological setting, Jesus expresses his expectation that faithful disciples will behave differently from 'this generation' while living in the midst of it, as Noah did (Gen 7:1).

In each of these cases, the phrase 'this generation' characterises not merely Jesus' contemporaries, but humanity in the present age in which the kingdom of God is drawing nearer. The expression draws attention to the attitude characterised by those in the stories of Israel who were faithless and disobedient. In the fourth occurrence (13:30) the phrase has a similar reference, expressing the urgency of repentance in the light of the coming *eschaton*. Remaining in 'this generation' means judgement (cf. Mt 23:13-39), therefore one must distance oneself from its prevailing attitudes of faithlessness and spiritual perversity through faith and obedience to God.<sup>41</sup> The term is thus ultimately an anthropological one, expressing in a variant form a negative view of humanity in its unrestored state.

Jesus casts himself in the role of a physician (ἰατρός, 2:17) who has come to serve not the healthy (ἰσχύοντες) but the sick (κακῶς ἔχοντες). He partially interprets this metaphor as his calling not the righteous (δίκαιοι) but sinners (ἁμαρτωλοί). Although these terms are used by Mark in his narration (2:15, 16), the dichotomy appears to reflect Pharisaic thinking.<sup>42</sup> Jesus' primary reference thus appears to be those who are not approved by the Pharisees. However, Jesus' term 'the righteous' must be read ironically.<sup>43</sup> As he finally designates as 'sinners' those who have consistently opposed him ('The Son of Man is being handed over into the hands of sinners', 14:41) he shows that 'the righteous' is actually an empty set. This last

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<sup>40</sup> Lövestam, *This Generation*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Lövestam, *This Generation*, 81–87.

<sup>42</sup> 'Sinners' were 'those who disregarded or opposed what the Pharisees ruled as essential to the proper keeping of the law.' Dunn, "Jesus and Holiness," 185.

<sup>43</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 65; Lane, *Mark*, 105.

saying is a particularisation of Jesus' second passion prediction, in which he anticipates his being 'handed over into the hands of men (εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων, 9:31). The third passion prediction specifies these 'men' as chief priests, scribes and Gentiles (10:33). To the extent that ἄνθρωπος in 9:31 is a generalisation for humanity (as it certainly is in 7:14-23), the parallelism of these sayings comes close to categorising all humanity as 'sinners'.

Jesus' use of the term 'ransom' (λύτρον, 10:45) implies a state of bondage out of which humanity needs to be delivered. The identification of Isaiah 53:1-12 as the probable background of this saying<sup>44</sup> strengthens the conclusion that Jesus sees the plight of humanity as universal affliction with sin and guilt.

Apart from the words of Jesus, the Gospel assumes the pervasive presence of sin in human beings. This is a well-documented concept in the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>45</sup> It appears at the outset of the Gospel, as John baptises for the forgiveness of sins. Mark highlights the murderous attitudes of Herod and Herodias, and the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, and other stories give examples of wealth-seeking (10:22), false accusation (3:21), false testimony (14:56, 57), various forms of brutal violence toward Jesus (14:65; 15:17-20), and the shocking cruelty of crucifixion.

### **Metaphors of distortion**

In addition to straight-forward description, Mark's Gospel uses figurative language to represent deformations of human relations with God and others. Blindness and deafness stand as symbols of miscommunication and misunderstanding. These are not mere weaknesses, for they are symbolically corrected by the miraculous opening

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<sup>44</sup> As argued at length by Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 257–87.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Job 25:4 (How can one be clean who is born of woman?); Eccl 7:20 (There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and who never sins); Ps 58:3 (The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth); Ps 51:5 (I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me).



of eyes and ears (see 2.5 above).<sup>46</sup> In Mark's story, non-understanding is construing Jesus and his words and deeds in terms of 'the things of men' rather than 'the things of God' (8:33). For the disciples, that (non-)understanding was corrected outside of the story, at the post-resurrection meeting in Galilee (projected in 16:7) or at Pentecost, when the disciples learned to construe things in terms of 'the things of God'.<sup>47</sup> But Mark, in showing that Jesus has to correct the misunderstanding of many characters,<sup>48</sup> thus suggests that lack of perception is a fundamental human problem.

Another persistent metaphor in the Gospel is 'hardness of heart'. This expression is rooted in the scriptures, notably in Exodus.<sup>49</sup> Mark diagnoses both disciples and Pharisees with this condition. In 3:5 Jesus labels the Pharisees' opposition to him as *πωρώσις τῆς καρδίας*. In 6:52 (a narrative comment) and in 8:17 (Jesus' question) the hardening of the disciples' hearts (*ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη*) is posited as the cause of their failure to understand Jesus' project. This echoes the incomprehension of the 'fat heart' of Isaiah 6:9-10, which Mark selectively quotes in 4:12. In 10:5 *σκληροκαρδία* is not a negative response to Jesus but a more generalised and longstanding condition that characterises lack of faithfulness (particularly in respect of marriage) and 'conduct inappropriate to God's dealing with the world'.<sup>50</sup> Dan Via suggests that 'hardness of heart' is an expression of the deformation and impairment of the wellsprings of understanding and of action, and may be Mark's formulation for fundamental human fallenness.<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> This perspective is explicit in Mt 16:17, following Peter's flash of understanding: 'For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.'

<sup>47</sup> Norman R. Petersen, "'Literarkritik', the New Literary Criticism," in *The Four Gospels 1992*, ed. F. Van Segbroeck, C.K. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, and J. Verheyden (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 947.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., 3:31-35; 7:8-13; 10:27; 11:27-31; 12:13-17.

<sup>49</sup> The hardening of Pharaoh's heart (e.g., Ex 4:21; 7:4; 8:19, 32; 13:15) is a stubborn refusal to listen and act on behalf of God's people.

<sup>50</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 119.

<sup>51</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 116.

‘hard heart’ is, then, the expression Jesus uses for pointing to the ‘fundamental defect at the inner core of human being.’<sup>52</sup>

The metaphorical use of ‘leaven’ is also associated with defects of the heart. Although Matthew 16:6, 11-12 interprets it as false teaching, and Luke 12:1 as hypocrisy, it was a common Jewish term for the ‘evil inclination’<sup>53</sup> or ‘stubbornness of heart’,<sup>54</sup> and Mark’s use of the term in 8:15 may reflect this.<sup>55</sup>

### **The need for transformation**

According to Mark’s text, then, the condition of the people to whom the message of the Gospel comes is characterised and illustrated by defective bodies and deficient minds. The human being is deformed at its very centre—the heart. This distortion, or misorientation, is seen in terms of impurity, sin, perversity and self-centredness. It is manifested in behaviour that is considered to be at odds with the rule of God. It issues in distorted relationships and conflictual communities. This fracturing within humanity mirrors the fractured nature of the cosmos in Mark’s perspective (e.g., 13:8, 24-25). Humans participate in the deformation of the universe, demoniacs perhaps to a greater extent than other people.<sup>56</sup>

In summary, Mark’s theological anthropology is predominantly negative.

Richard Hays says it well:

Mark is hardly a cheerful optimist about the human capacity to fulfill the will of God. He knows well the weakness of the flesh, the deceitfulness of the heart, and the darkness of the mind.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 120.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., *Gen. Rab.* 34.10, commenting on Gen 8:21 (‘the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth’): ‘Miserable is the yeast concerning which the one who kneaded it testifies that it is no good’. Cf. 1 Cor 5:6-8 (‘the leaven of malice and wickedness’).

<sup>54</sup> 1QS 5:4-5 equates ‘stubbornness of heart’ with one’s (evil) inclination (רָצוֹן).

<sup>55</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 507, 510.

<sup>56</sup> On this see Bird, “Tearing”.

<sup>57</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 82.



The Gospel thus posits a fundamental aspect of the human condition—the need for re-orientation, restoration and transformation. This need is verbalised by Jesus when he states that the ‘sick’ have need of a physician (2:17), and it lies behind Mark’s soteriology: Jesus serves humanity as its ransom (10:45), by shedding his blood on its behalf (14:24).

The next section explores the elements of transformation that Mark’s Gospel promotes. Beginning with the broad sweep of Mark’s eschatology, I will survey the ways in which Mark envisages transformation taking place, and then delineate aspects of individual and communal transformation.

## 5.4 Mark’s view of *anthrōpos* as transformed

### Transformation in Mark’s story

Some characters in Mark’s story are dramatically transformed. The Gerasene demoniac is perhaps the most notable (evidenced by changes in body, mind and practice) followed by Bartimaeus and all those who find significant healing through the actions and performative words of Jesus. The disciples, however, are minimally transformed. They certainly become Jesus’ agents, participating successfully in the proclamation of the kingdom (6:7-13) and in the miraculous distribution of loaves and fish (6:37-44; 8:1-9), and their asserted willingness to die with Jesus (14:31) indicates some degree of change in the direction of firm commitment. They are undergoing a process of transformation, yet at the moment of crisis they flee, and at the end of the story they are still afraid and lacking in understanding; they have not yet become ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων. If Mark’s purpose is the transformation of his readers,

on what basis can he expect this to happen, and how?<sup>58</sup>

The realisation of Jesus' promise of resurrection is implied by the empty tomb and the words of the νεανίσκος, 'He is risen' (16:6). The promise of his meeting in Galilee (14:28) is repeated (16:7) but not realised. It is clear that the realisation of these promises *in the experience of the disciples* took place subsequent to and outside of the story that Mark tells. If it had not, he would not have told the story as it stands; his writing assumes that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the pivotal events from which the new Christian community derives its transformed life.

Furthermore, the stories of Jesus' restorative ministry function not only as proclamations of his own authority and power but also as clear hints of the restoration and transformation of humanity according to God's intention. They betray the presence of a vision of newness that is hardly realised in the story and is still only partially realised in Mark's experience. The miracles 'enact in the visual world a representation of the kingdom of God that had arrived in the person of Jesus'.<sup>59</sup> In Kee's words,

the healings and exorcisms are placed in a larger structure which sees what is happening as clues and foretastes of a new situation in which the purpose of God will finally be accomplished in the creation, and his people will be vindicated and at peace.<sup>60</sup>

Amos Wilder makes this point strongly: the Gospel stories of healings and deliverances presuppose that Jesus' interventions for individuals should not be seen

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<sup>58</sup> Suzanne Henderson's recent assertion (*Christology and Discipleship*) that the disciples' participation in 'God's apocalyptic rectification of the world' amounts to a 'transformation' (60, 244) seems, in the light of Jesus' dismay at their hardness of heart and growing miscomprehension of him and his mission, to be an unwarranted overstatement. W.R. Telford comes to the same conclusion (*Review of Biblical Literature*, 19 June 2008). Denise Steele is correct when she writes that the disciples 'progress, but do not emerge into full maturity as gospel selves' ("Having Root," 249); i.e., she detects development, but this is not the same thing as transformation. Although fear is sometimes a 'human reaction to a manifestation of divine power' (David Catchpole, "The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb: A Study in Markan Theology," *JTSA* 18 [1977]: 9) as in 4:41 and possibly 5:15, fear is usually negatively evaluated in Mark (e.g., 5:33, 36; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32; 11:18).

<sup>59</sup> Ellenburg, "Review," 174.

<sup>60</sup> Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 79.



as isolated cases but as manifestations of a general redemption for the whole people of God. They are not mere individual cases of wonder-working, and not merely expressions of compassion. The greater meaning is the deliverance of all. Demons are driven out of a few, but the greater significance is that Satan is radically and generally dispossessed. In these stories ‘the transformation of the world is pledged and foretasted’.<sup>61</sup>

Thus the narrative presents the possibility of a new kind of personal and relational existence that could well be called ‘eschatological personhood’.

### **Transformation as eschatological anthropology**

Since such a renewed and transformed human personhood finds no exemplar in the Gospel apart from Jesus himself, its characterisation will necessarily be based on, and extrapolated from, his teachings and actions. The expression ‘eschatological anthropology’ is appropriate here.<sup>62</sup> John Webster points out that Christian anthropology is eschatological in two senses. First, the ontology of the human being is shaped by the eschatological events depicted in the Gospels as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the regenerative work of God in those who have faith. He concludes:

Thus Christian anthropology ... will be concerned with convertedness, that newness of life bestowed by the Spirit in which true human being is to be found. I am what in Christ through the Spirit I become.<sup>63</sup>

Second, writes Webster,

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<sup>61</sup> Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 68–74. Similarly, Hendrickx (*The Miracle Stories of the Synoptic Gospels* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987], 26) sees the miracles of Jesus as indicating ‘conversion of being’.

<sup>62</sup> The term is used by James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 67, in relation to early Jewish conceptions. More recently the topic has been addressed significantly by Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 181f.

<sup>63</sup> John Webster, “Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 (2000): 14

Christian anthropology is eschatological in the sense that its account of human identity is possessed of a distinct teleology. It sets what it has to say about human identity in the context of the gospel's announcement of a comprehensive account of God's purposes for creation.<sup>64</sup>

How is this evident in Mark's Gospel? In the former sense, transformation is appropriated by personal repentance, faith, 'taking up the cross' and following Jesus (8:34). In the second sense, the transformed psychological and ethical self must be seen as a component of the wider 'kingdom of God' that includes 'the restoration of all things' (9:12). The kingdom is 'the horizon against which Christian life is to be lived, and it is the goal toward which all must point'.<sup>65</sup>

Mark's vision of 'eschatological anthropology' is broad and multifaceted. On the one hand it requires a return to God's original design for humanity. Jesus' presence 'with the wild animals' (1:13) hints at an Edenic setting in which a unified creation is re-established.<sup>66</sup> In defending his disciples' infraction of Sabbath regulations, Jesus appeals to God's original intention in creation ('The Sabbath is made for people', 2:27) and affirms its renewal in the new age that he is announcing.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, his words about divorce (10:2-9) amount to a denunciation of human sinfulness and a call for the restoration of the Creator's original principles. By grounding the management of human marriage on God's primary purposes rather than on human concessions to sin, Jesus here again contrasts the 'things of men' with the 'things of God' (cf. 8:33).

On the other hand, and in addition, Mark's eschatology envisages a future of new creation. The metaphors of wine and cloth in 2:21-22 speak of the newness of

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<sup>64</sup> Webster, "Eschatology," 14.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 39.

<sup>66</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 194. Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age," in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ*, ed. Joel B. Green and M. Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3-21, expands this insight: Jesus is the 'truly righteous person' who enjoys a fearless dominion over animals as originally intended (cf. Job 5:22-23), and he also represents the establishment of messianic peace with wild animals, as prophesied in Hos 2:18, Isa 11:6-9 and Isa 65:25.

<sup>67</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 246.



the kingdom, in terms that imply not just restoration of the old but a fresh creation.<sup>68</sup> The seed parables of 4:26-32 proclaim the unstoppable growth of the kingdom of God, who will transform the old age into the new age, creating a new cosmos.<sup>69</sup> Several uses of ποιέω<sup>70</sup> have been perceived by some readers as allusions to Genesis 1:1-2:3, with the implication that Jesus' creative acts are part of God's means of renewing the creation, humanity included—'I will make you to become ...' (1:17).<sup>71</sup>

Some aspects of eschatological hope are assumed in Mark's story.<sup>72</sup> The disciples' expectation of restoration comes to light in 9:11. Their scenario, based presumably on Malachi 4:5, 6 and Sirach 48:10, has Elijah appearing for the purpose of restoring righteousness and harmony ahead of the 'great and terrible day of Yahweh'. The disciples cannot square this with Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection. Jesus affirms the correctness of this expectation concerning Elijah, while revealing that Elijah's role has already been fulfilled by John the Baptist, and that Jesus himself must die and be raised before the final restoration (9:12, 13).<sup>73</sup> Jesus finds it necessary to modify both this eschatological concept and that referred

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Ezekiel's visions (34-36) of Israel as a community renewed, transformed and 'recreated' through the Spirit of God. Chester, "Resurrection," 52, describes this as 'a vision of the world as it should be ... an image of what a renewed and perfect existence could be like'.

<sup>69</sup> Marcus, *Mystery*, 232.

<sup>70</sup> Jesus *makes* fishers of people (1:17), *makes* disciples (3:14-16), *does* miracles (5:19-20), and '*does* all things well' (7:37).

<sup>71</sup> E.g., Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 267, 481.

<sup>72</sup> Restoration of the nation of Israel, the liberation of Jerusalem and the restoration of the Temple were common eschatological expectations for Jews of the first century CE. According to Göran Lennartsson, *Refreshing and Restoration: Two Eschatological Motifs in Acts 3:19-21* (Lund: Lund University, 2007), 288, Luke's expressions καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως (times of refreshing) and χρόνοι ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων (times to restore everything) (Acts 3:19-21) both refer to the messianic era, and many Jews would have associated them with a universal and cosmic transformation of the world and a return to the paradisiac order of Eden. Similarly, the Qumran documents expect the eschatological restoration of fallen humanity to its original glory through a process of purification (1QS 4:20b-21; 23-25), removal of the 'evil inclination' (1QS 5:4b-5), recovery of the lost glory of Adam (e.g., 1QH 4:15) and the attainment of perfection; this would happen concurrently with the restoration of Israel's political and religious institutions. See further Deasley, *Qumran Theology*, 291-95.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 274.

to by the Sadducees: the final resurrection (12:18, 23) will indeed take place (12:23-27) but not as the Sadducees wrongly imagine it.

Similarly, much of the power of Mark's text derives from an appropriation of older eschatological traditions in new ways. As Rikki Watts has demonstrated,<sup>74</sup> a major component of the theological background to the Gospel is the 'new exodus' motif of Isaiah. Mark takes up many of the eschatological hopes of Isaiah—deliverance, liberation, restoration, healing—indicated in such passages as Isaiah 43:14-21, and shows them coming to fruition in the ministry of Jesus, who for him is the human manifestation of Yahweh. For example, Jesus' healings of the blind, the deaf, the lame and the mute appear to fulfil the apocalyptic predictions of Isaiah 35:5-6; in forgiving the paralytic's sin (Mark 2:1-12) he takes on the role of God in Isaiah 43:25 (cf. 40:1-2 and 44:22); the intercalated stories of the two women (Mark 5:21-43) echo many of the images of Isaiah 63-66.<sup>75</sup> Mark shows that Jesus is the agent of God's 'apocalyptic rectification' of Israel,<sup>76</sup> indeed, of the world, since healing, forgiveness, repentance and faith are offered to and demonstrated by Gentiles in the Gospel.<sup>77</sup>

However, the often perplexing synchronicity of Isaiah's visions is replaced in Mark's Gospel by a more distinct diachronicity that distinguishes the time of the prophets (1:2, 3; 4:12; 7:6, 7; 14:21), the beginning of a new story centering on Jesus (1:1), his own time subsequent to the resurrection of Jesus (9:9; 14:9; 13:9-13) and finally 'the end' (13:24-37) and 'the age to come' characterised by 'eternal life' (10:30).<sup>78</sup> But for Mark, human transformation will not have to wait until 'the end of

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<sup>74</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*.

<sup>75</sup> Rikki Watts, "Daughter Zion," 28.

<sup>76</sup> Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 481, fittingly notes that Mark's use of these Isaianic themes reverses Isaiah's exclusion of 'unclean' Gentiles and enemies of Israel, as does Luke's use of Isa 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19; both highlight blessing rather than judgment for the Gentiles.

<sup>78</sup> For a more detailed treatment see Via, *Ethics*, 31-32.



all things', because it can begin with repentance and faith in the experience of the hearer/reader who believes. This is able to happen because 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (1:15)—the time of restoration and renewal has been decisively inaugurated by the coming of Jesus the Messiah. Marshall calls this a 'self-realising eschatology'—an eschatology that is in the process of becoming reality.<sup>79</sup> The Gospel thus assumes the eschatological tension of 'already/not yet' that is made explicit by Paul.<sup>80</sup>

### **The way of transformation**

If Mark's rhetorical purpose is the transformation of his audience, as I have been arguing, how does he envisage the process? Four 'moments' (not necessarily successive) can be discerned in the Gospel.

#### *1. Repentance*

Mark seems to prioritise repentance, for this is the initial call in the ministries of John the Baptist (1:4, 5), Mark's Jesus (1:15) and the missionary disciples (6:12).<sup>81</sup> These are the only occurrences of *μετάνοια* and *μετανοέω* in Mark's Gospel (*ἐπιστρέφω* is used in 4:12) and they seem to indicate that repentance is the initial human movement toward transformation. However, radical turning is stressed throughout the Gospel. John's penitents turn away from their sins. The disciples turn away from their daily occupations to follow Jesus (1:16-20; 2:14), interpreting this as 'leaving all' (*ἀφίημι*, 10:28, 29) for the sake of Jesus and the gospel, and Jesus requires that wealth be left behind before 'entering the kingdom' (10:21). Several of

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<sup>79</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "Eschatology at the Heart of New Testament Theology," in *What Are We Waiting For?: Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Stephen Holmes and Russell Rook (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 41.

<sup>80</sup> E.g., 2 Cor 4; 2 Cor 3:18.

<sup>81</sup> See my previous discussion of repentance, pp. 51-53.

Jesus' sayings urge reversals of mind and attitude: the mind must be turned from 'the things of men' to 'the things of God' (8:33, cf. 7:8), from self to Jesus (8:34) and from honour and worldly authority to servanthood (9:35; 10:42-45). While repentance and belief are not specifically mentioned in the story of the Gerasene demoniac, the man's fervent desire to follow Jesus (5:18) is evidence that he has heeded Jesus' words, repented and believed. These turnings are responses of re-orientation (away from self-interest and towards God) that also motivate and energise further change.

## *2. Understanding and faith*

Mark's model reader will demonstrate not only repentance, but also understanding and faith. Much has already been said about the motif of understanding in the Gospel (see 2.5 and 4.2). Changes in perception can be transformative. Although narrated changes in characters' perceptions are minimal in the story, Mark's use of the related metaphors of blindness and deafness assume that eyes will be opened, that ears will truly hear and that the message of the kingdom will be understood. It is especially ironic that blind Bartimaeus identifies Jesus correctly as Messiah (10:46-52). The centurion's acclamation of Jesus as 'Son of God' at the end of the story (15:39) represents the beginnings of an understanding that appears to be Mark's goal for his audience.<sup>82</sup> He urges a new theological standpoint, a new perception (of Jesus, of God, of the kingdom of God and of one's part in it) that will be the foundation for a new value system, and consequently a new ethical outlook.

The problem of the disciples' lack of comprehension, despite much explanation from Jesus, is not solved within the text of Mark's Gospel, but in 16:7 it is hinted that the disciples will 'see' Jesus in Galilee and gain true understanding;

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<sup>82</sup> David F. Smith, "Can We Hear?" 261.



this will be the ‘moment of reversal’.<sup>83</sup> From the audience’s perspective, this moment is already past. That the disciples *were* transformed is historically evident, and this fact enables the portrayal of their incomprehension in the text to be viewed as ironic; the portrayal is thus rhetorically potent.

How is ‘blindness’ reversed? It is not possible to track the process by which understanding dawns—even the sower in the parable does not know how this happens (4:27). However, understanding is a function of the heart (Isaiah 6:10, which lies behind Mark 4:12, makes this clear) and for Mark, true perception is only possible with an ‘unhardened’ heart. The healing (replacement, even) of Israel’s hard heart is a clear expectation of the later prophets, especially Ezekiel:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. (Ezek 11:19, cf. 36:26)

Jesus’ words (e.g., about divorce in Mark 10:5-9 and ‘new wine’ in 2:21-22) imply that the time for fulfilment had come, and that through the creation of ‘new hearts’ new understanding could now be attained.<sup>84</sup> What Mark wants his readers to understand is a *new* revelation that comes as a word from God, sown into their hearts (4:14-20) where, ideally, it is heard, received, understood and made to become fruitful.

Mark’s model readers will ‘see’ and understand, and turn their hearts to God in faith. Understanding and faith seem to be somewhat complementary: faith is dependent to some extent on understanding, while its exercise releases further understanding; it is both a component and an instrument of personal transformation. Mark’s emphasis on faith highlights an essential component of authentic humanity: acknowledgement of the primacy of relationship to God. Jesus’ command, ‘Have faith in God’ (11:22) is linked to a ‘whoever’ saying (11:23) that indicates ‘direct

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<sup>83</sup> Norman R. Petersen, “The Reader in the Gospel,” *Neotestamentica* 18 (1984): 49.

<sup>84</sup> See further N.T. Wright, *Victory*, 282–87; Stettler, “Purity of Heart,” 488–95.

address' to the audience, calling them to a trustful confidence in the presence of God's eschatological power in the person of Jesus.<sup>85</sup>

### 3. *Entering the kingdom of God*

While the term βασιλεία does not have a primarily spatial connotation,<sup>86</sup> it sometimes naturally evokes a spatial image, so that the metaphor 'entering the kingdom of God', used several times in Mark's Gospel, implies a movement, or transition, from outside to inside. As such, it is another way in which the Gospel depicts the process of transformation. The metaphor would probably have evoked vivid associations with the stories of Israel entering the promised land of Canaan (e.g., Dt 4:1; 6:17-18; 16:20). The phrase 'entering the kingdom of God' (9:47) is placed in apposition to 'entering life' (9:43, 45). It appears again in 10:15. As used in 10:23-25 it is equivalent to 'being saved' (10:26) and to 'inheriting eternal life' (10:17, 30). While these equivalences may suggest that the metaphor refers to life after death, especially since its opposite is 'being cast into hell' (9:43, 45, 47), the seed parables (4:26-32) view the kingdom of God as a present reality, albeit incipient and immature. The requirements for entry include actions expected to be carried out in the present time: 'receiving the kingdom as a child' (10:15) and relinquishing wealth (10:21, 23, 25, 29, 30). In John's Gospel, entering the kingdom involves the concept of becoming 'reborn' (John 3:5). Marcus is thus correct to interpret the image not as physical movement into a realm but as 'participation in the already-inaugurated explosion of God's kingly power into the world'.<sup>87</sup> To enter the kingdom is to embark on the journey of discipleship, to begin to conform to the

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<sup>85</sup> C.D. Marshall, *Faith*, 232.

<sup>86</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 172, notes that, following the nuance of the Hebrew expression מְלִכּוּת שָׁמַיִם, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is 'not so much *the place* where God rules as the *fact* that he rules or the *power* by which he rules'. Marcus translates it 'dominion'.

<sup>87</sup> Joel Marcus, "Entering Into the Kingly Power of God," *JBL* 107 (1988): 674.



principles of the kingdom (which may, in fact, imply continuing conformity to the principles of Torah [12:28-34]) and to experience a new way of being that acknowledges the dominion of God. In Via's words, it is participation in 'a new story which moves toward a redemptive future'.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4. *Discipleship*

It is important to note here the dialectic between anthropology and christology in the Gospel. Since the central focus of the Gospel is the person of Christ, the transformation of the reader will have a christological basis; it will depend on an acknowledgement (in fact, a full acclamation) of Jesus as healer, teacher, prophet, Messiah and Son of God. Burrige argues that the moral imitation of the subject was an important purpose of ancient biography<sup>89</sup>—the cultural expectation was that the life portrayed was worth imitating. Thus the pattern for discipleship is Jesus himself; he models the attitudes and behaviours that will characterise the believing model reader of the Gospel.<sup>90</sup> The audience will be transformed to the extent that they become his followers, finding their identity in being 'with him' as disciples.

We do not find in Mark's Gospel any call to imitate Jesus as explicit as that of John 13:14-17.<sup>91</sup> However, the culmination of Jesus' teaching on servanthood (Mark 10:42-44) is a statement of the extent of his own servanthood (10:45), implying that he himself is the model for his teaching. His oft-repeated invitation, 'Follow me', functions similarly, with its radical implications (self-denial and

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<sup>88</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Burrige, *Imitating Jesus*, 179.

<sup>90</sup> David Rhoads, "Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgment," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 362–63, lists some of these: Jesus serves people as healer and preacher without seeking acclamation for himself; he speaks the truth whether people favour him or reject him; he refuses to dominate others, but becomes a victim; he is least in the society, suffering ridicule and rejection; he loses his life in the service of the kingdom of God; the orientation of his life is the will of God.

<sup>91</sup> After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus says, 'I gave you an example, that as I did to you, you also should do.' (John 13:15)

‘taking up the cross’) becoming clear in 8:34. The disciples’ struggle to follow Jesus makes it evident that he is hard to follow.<sup>92</sup> Part of the difficulty is that suffering is unavoidable; to be ‘on the way’ (8:27; 9:33; 10:17, 32) is to travel the path of obedient suffering. Jesus’ predictions of the persecution of his followers (10:30, 39; 13:9-13) leave no doubt that ‘the norm for discipleship is defined by the cross’.<sup>93</sup> BurrIDGE appropriately calls the Gospel ‘an interim eschatological ethic in suffering’.<sup>94</sup> Its readers, therefore, cannot expect that their transformation will be painless.

The above considerations emphasise human activity. Jesus urges change, and those who respond by hearing, repenting, leaving and following participate in their own transformation. However, there is a creative tension of human and divine factors that reveals passive elements in the Gospel’s vision of transformation,<sup>95</sup> expressed in terms of receiving divine mercy. Active participation on the part of those healed by Jesus is not always called for, although faith is usually involved. In his initial encounter with Jesus, the Gerasene demoniac does little but come to Jesus. Similarly, Bartimaeus merely cries out to Jesus. Both are transformed, as are others in the Gospel who simply express their need and who recognise Jesus as the one to whom they should apply. In both the Gerasene story and the Bartimaeus story God’s *mercy* is a central factor—the motivation for God’s transforming action towards both a Gentile and a Jew. Jesus interprets the demoniac’s healing as the mercy of God (5:19), and the blind man’s repeated pleas for mercy (ἐλέησόν με, 10:47, 48) are granted.<sup>96</sup> Thus the transformation of the men is experienced as the reception of

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<sup>92</sup> To the extent that the audience also identifies with the disciples and learns from them, the disciples also act as models, for they continue to follow Jesus, albeit falteringly. BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus*, 182.

<sup>93</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 84.

<sup>94</sup> BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus*, 167.

<sup>95</sup> Via, *Revelation*.

<sup>96</sup> This is a common cry for help in the scriptures, e.g., 16 times in the Psalms.



a gift that frees them to follow Jesus and proclaim him. For Mark as for other NT writers, God's mercy is creative, transforming its objects.<sup>97</sup>

To summarise: transformation might take place in a reader of the Gospel by a process involving repentance, understanding, faith, reception of God's mercy, an acknowledgement of the reign of God, and discipleship that includes suffering. I move on now to discuss some specific characteristics of the transformed individual.

## 5.5 The transformed individual

### Restored relationship with God

Mark expects that his model reader will experience a transformed relationship with God. Such a relationship is indicated by Mark's use of familial terms, and by the way in which he directs attention to forgiveness, salvation and prayer.

Mark's Jesus conventionally designates God as the 'Father in heaven' (11:25) for his followers. Although Mark's Gospel does not designate humans as 'children of God', this would not have been a new way of speaking about God.<sup>98</sup> There are four references to God as Father in Mark: Jesus speaks of God as his Father in 8:38 and 14:36, as 'the Father' in 13:32, and only once of 'your Father' in

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. 1 Pet 2:9-10, where mercy is significant in a discourse about transformation: 'who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.' Cf. also Paul's discourse on mercy and 'vessels of mercy' in Rom 9:14-26.

<sup>98</sup> Jesus calls a cripple τέκνον in 2:5, and his disciples, uniquely in the synoptics, τέκνα in 10:24. The latter designation may be a colloquial and affectionate epithet, equivalent to 'lads' (France, *Gospel*, 404), or an indication that the disciples are 'children in spiritual knowledge' (Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 283). Gottlob Schrenk, s.v. πατήρ, in *TDNT*, V: 978, notes that although 'father' was not a favourite designation for God in the Hebrew writings, it had become a common form of divine address by the time of Jesus. Mark's use of πατήρ in this sense, then, does not represent a new departure.

11:25. However, Jesus unconventionally modifies his Jewish followers' identity as 'children of God' with the addition, 'my brother, sister and mother' (3:35). This new identity is conditional upon 'doing the will of God'. The statement replaces a traditional concept of family based primarily on natural kinship (a formal and passive relationship) with a concept of a fictive family based on conformity to God's desires (an active and intentional relationship). It also opens up membership of the 'family of God' to all ('whoever'), regardless of natural kinship. It is especially astonishing, given that Mark sees Jesus as 'Son of God' in a special sense. Some of Mark's readers are probably already familiar with the Christian habit of referring to each other as brothers and sisters (e.g., 1 Cor 7:15; Rom 14:10-21). This saying of Jesus confirms to them the origin of their spiritual relationship to each other through Jesus, and through him to God, whom they, too, may call 'Abba' (14:36).

Another 'whoever' saying pictures one's new relationship with God, through Jesus, as a reception, or welcome, signified by an embrace. Jesus brings a small child (παιδίον) to the group, embraces it (ἐναγκαλίζομαι) and says, 'Whoever receives one child like this in my name receives me, and whoever receives me does not receive me, but him who sent me' (9:37). The metaphor of embrace has been appropriately interpreted as 'a metonymy for the whole realm of personal relations in which the interplay between self and other takes place'; the opening of one's arms makes a space in oneself for the other, signifying an invitation to the other.<sup>99</sup> The model reader, then, will not only be ready to welcome children (for what this implies, see the discussion below) but also be open and receptive to intimacy with God.

Forgiveness by God, following repentance (4:12), characterises such a relationship. All the passages which mention 'sin' also mention forgiveness (1:4, 5;

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<sup>99</sup> Volf, *Exclusion*, 140–42.



2:5-10; 3:28, 29; 11:25). Having repented, Jesus' followers can expect to experience the freedom of release from the burden and stain of sin (cf. Ps 51). The applicability of this principle to all humanity is explicit in 3:28—all sins shall be forgiven for 'the sons of men'. Forgiveness brings a changed perspective in which people are empowered to forgive each other (11:25).

Mark desires 'salvation' for his readers; they will be those who have heard Jesus say, 'Your faith has saved you' (5:34; 10:52).<sup>100</sup> Salvation is wholeness in all of its dimensions—physical, spiritual and societal.<sup>101</sup> It is granted by Jesus to the haemorrhaging woman (5:21-34) and to the blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52) in response to their faith. Salvation is implied by Jesus' coming for those who are sick, needing a physician (2:17). It is the ultimate goal in 10:26 ('Who then can be saved?') where it is equivalent to having eternal life (10:17, 30), to having treasure in heaven (10:21), and to entering the kingdom of God (10:23-25). When the haemorrhaging woman is healed and 'saved' Jesus gives her his blessing, 'Go in peace' (5:34).<sup>102</sup> The peace (εἰρήνη) indicated here resonates well with the *shalom* expected as a component of eschatological salvation (e.g., Zech 9:10), and represents a state of 'fullness of wellbeing' which comes from standing in right relationship with God.<sup>103</sup> The audience intuitively understands that by placing similar faith in God they, too, will be 'saved'.

Mark seems to assume the use of prayer as dialogical communication with God, and it is not a prominent theme in the Gospel. Nevertheless, the necessity for faith and forgiveness in prayer (11:22-25) is important, in contrast to long prayers

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<sup>100</sup> The noun σωτηρία is not used in the Gospel. The verbal forms of σώζω carry the related concepts of healing and salvation. Followers are urged to lose their life in order to save it (8:35); ironically, Jesus is taunted with the words, 'he saved others, he cannot save himself' (15:30, 31). Followers are also urged to 'endure to the end' in order to be saved (13:13, 20).

<sup>101</sup> The words 'Your faith has saved you' also appear in Luke 7:50, where no physical healing is involved. Blomberg, "Your Faith", argues convincingly that holistic, spiritual healing (=salvation) is intended in Mark's use of σώζω.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Judg 18:6; 1 Sam 1:17; 2 Sam 15:9; 1 Kg 22:17.

<sup>103</sup> C.D. Marshall, *Faith*, 109; Werner Foerster, s.v. εἰρήνη, in *TDNT* II:405, 412-415.

‘for the sake of appearance’ (12:38-40).<sup>104</sup> Also important is Jesus’ exhortation to keep watching (γρηγορεῖτε) and praying (14:38). It echoes the warning of 13:35-37—‘What I say to you I say to all: Be on the alert (γρηγορεῖτε)!’—and so the disciples’ languor in the garden of Gethsemane represents a significant failure, especially in the light of Jesus’ example. The audience sees that the disciples are not yet fervent pray-ers; they are in need of transformation.

### Childlikeness

The model reader is characterised as (in some sense) a child. This is clear from Mark 10:13-16, which narrates Jesus’ reception and welcome of children who are brought to him for the purpose of receiving a ‘touch’, presumably a blessing. The disciples rebuke the carers of the children and hinder their access to Jesus. This reaction is another illustration of the disciples’ lack of understanding of Jesus’ teaching, for they have not heeded his previous words about receiving children (9:37) and they refuse to welcome them. Jesus, however, responds warmly, immediately and generously, affirming the intentions of those who have brought them. He is indignant with the disciples and orders them not to exclude the children, for the reason that ‘the kingdom of God belongs to such as these’ (10:14). Then, after declaring solemnly that entrance to the kingdom of God is for ‘whoever’ will receive it ‘like a little child’ (ὡς παιδίον, 10:15), he takes the children in his arms and blesses them, placing his hands on them (10:16).

Mark’s Gospel presents a remarkable and consistent picture of Jesus as one who receives and welcomes others, including children.<sup>105</sup> In 10:13-15 as in 9:33-37,

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<sup>104</sup> Jesus himself prays (6:46; 14:32, 35, 39), prayer is necessary for exorcism (9:29) and the Temple is the ‘house of prayer’ (11:17).

<sup>105</sup> E.g., 1:40-41; 2:3-5; 2:15; 5:1-20; 5:22; 5: 43; 7:26; 7:32-33; 8:22; 9:27; 10:21 and 10:49.



Jesus' welcome includes embrace (ἐναγκαλίζομαι). Whereas 9:33-37 envisions primarily the reception and embrace of Jesus (in the form of a child) by disciples, 10:13-16 envisions the embrace of disciples (or at least those who desire the blessing of God) by Jesus. The presence of both the verbal blessing and non-verbal embrace engages the audience at both cognitive and affective levels.

As in 9:33-37, Jesus' gesture is also an enacted parable. That is, the children are appropriated metaphorically for the purpose of teaching about the kingdom of God. Jesus makes of the incident two theological points.

The first (10:14) is in regard to the constitution of the kingdom of God. 'Permit the children to come to me ... for of such (τῶν τοιούτων) is the kingdom of God.' Does the genitive τῶν τοιούτων mean 'belongs to such' or 'consists of such'? It matters little whether 'little children' (παιδία) are viewed as inhabitants or participants of the kingdom; the kingdom is the sphere in which they are at home. Jesus insists here that the quality of *anthrōpos* appropriate for the kingdom of God is that of the child. However, the metaphor is not entirely clear, because there are many qualities and characteristics of children that could be relevant here.

Jesus' second point (10:15) is about the means of entering that kingdom. Jesus insists that each seeker must enter 'as a child.' The child imagery here is thus an 'image of discipleship.'<sup>106</sup> But does this image signify some mode of action, or some way of being, or a certain attitude?

James Francis gives three lines of interpretation for the phrase 'as a little child.'<sup>107</sup> The first takes the phrase to mean 'as one receives a little child.' This makes the child the object rather than the subject. However, this reading is awkward

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<sup>106</sup> James Francis, "Children and Childhood in the New Testament," in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. S.C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 84.

<sup>107</sup> James Francis, *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 113-24.

because it would require a close and sudden shift in metaphorical association between child and kingdom; furthermore, it is not congruent with the parallel texts, Matthew 18:3 and John 3:5.

The second takes the phrase to mean ‘as a little child receives,’ referring to some childlike quality. There is vagueness here as to what this quality might be. Many suggestions have been made: innocence, trust, openness,<sup>108</sup> dependence,<sup>109</sup> and simplicity.<sup>110</sup> I would argue that the evident *low status* of the child speaks most loudly in these passages. The ‘child’ sayings in 9:37 and 10:14, 15 are Jesus’ responses to the disciples’ concern for status; the child exemplifies those who are ‘last of all, and servant of all’. It is most plausible that Jesus uses the child as a model of one who has no basis for pretensions of greatness, nor presumptions of self-importance or self-empowerment, nor any concern for status in the adult world, and can do nothing but receive, openly and confidently, the gift that is offered.<sup>111</sup> Because children have no reputation to protect, there is no distinction between the ‘private self’ and the ‘public self’.<sup>112</sup> Because children occupied the lowest position in first century society, to be ‘as a child’ was to break with the conventional hierarchy of values and opt for a life characterised by humility and vulnerability.<sup>113</sup> Joel Marcus comments that in Jewish conceptions taken up by Jesus in this saying, the child is one who must submit to the wisdom, will and rule of his parent; he is not one who does anything on his own, but rather one who lives his life under the dominion, and relies on the activity, of another.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John Nolland, *Luke*, WBC, Vol 35B (Dallas: Word, 1993), 882.

<sup>109</sup> Marcus, “Entering,” 673.

<sup>110</sup> Léon Roy, “Child,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd Ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1982), 71

<sup>111</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 340; Lane, *Mark*, 340, 360; Evans, *Mark*, 94.

<sup>112</sup> Bruce J. Malina, “‘Let Him Deny Himself’ (Mark 8:34 & Par): A Social Psychological Model of Self-Denial,” *BTB* 24 (1994): 114.

<sup>113</sup> Wim Weren, “Children in Matthew: A Semantic Study,” *Concilium* 1996, no. 2 (1996): 53–63.

<sup>114</sup> Marcus, “Entering,” 672.



This perspective is one for which Francis offers strong evidence in his earlier work.<sup>115</sup> However, Francis argues in a later work for a third interpretation on the basis of the parallels in Matthew and John.<sup>116</sup> Matthew 18:3 states the condition for entering the kingdom of Heaven in the form ἐὰν μὴ στραφῇτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παῖδιά—‘unless you *turn* and *become* like children.’ In John 3:5-7 the condition is δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν—‘you must be born again’ in order to enter the kingdom. These conditions both speak of a radical transformation. Francis comments that the child imagery here is a ‘call to transformation ... a radical statement of the need to make a fresh start, to enter upon a new existence.’<sup>117</sup> The phrase ὡς παιδίον could thus mean ‘as a little child’ in the sense of *becoming* a little child. The figure would thus speak not so much descriptively (of the characteristics of a child) as adverbally (of the necessity of *movement* towards those characteristics)—for an adult to ‘receive the kingdom like a child’ obviously involves a change from adult to child.<sup>118</sup> The concept of *becoming* a child also rings true to Jesus’ insistence on repentance and radical reorientation.

This more dynamic interpretation does not necessarily negate that which identifies those characteristics as indicators of low status. If we take this view, the model reader welcomes God’s reign by becoming childlike in the sense of relinquishing all claims to achievement and worldly esteem. Dan Via takes a similar view; by tracing the ‘archetype’ of the child he reaches the conclusion that ‘becoming a child’ is abandoning the security of hardened adulthood, and renouncing the shape of one’s present existence in order to begin again.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Francis, “Children,” 66–72.

<sup>116</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 119–24.

<sup>117</sup> Francis, *Adults as Children*, 119, 121.

<sup>118</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 129.

<sup>119</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 130–31.

Interestingly, the immediately subsequent pericopae of Mark 10 provide two contrasting examples. The rich man (10:17-24) has high status in the community, thinks that he is able to do something to inherit the kingdom of God, and is not willing to relinquish his possessions in order to follow Jesus; he has not yet become a ‘child’. On the other hand, Bartimaeus the blind beggar (10:46-52) lacks any pretensions; his call to Jesus for mercy is a recognition of his dire need and of Jesus’ position of power. That he has received ‘as a child’ is implicit in the text if dependence, obedience and lack of pretension are the marks of childhood that Jesus has alluded to.

From the perspective of transformation, the force of the child imagery may be that one must become as one of low status, relativising, as Jesus does, the conventional system of social recognition. Implicit in this is the dependence shown by an acknowledgement of one’s need of God, a receiving of what God offers as a gift, and a subjection to God in responses of obedience.

### **Self-denial**

The corollary of a transformed relationship with God is the kind of transformed self-understanding for which I will use the term ‘self-denial’, derived from 8:34. Although ‘self-denial’ encompasses a variety of ethical behaviours that I will mention below, it is important first to delineate the contours of the term as it relates fundamentally to the Gospel’s ‘vision of human existence’.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> This section draws on parts of my previous dissertation, “Honour as a Foundation for Self-Denial in the Gospels,” Th.M. thesis (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College, 2000), in which I employed a model presented by David A. DeSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1999). The ‘self-denial’ sayings occur, without exception, in literary settings which qualify as ‘honour discourse’, where the rhetorical appeal is to the avoidance of shame and the seeking of honour. The Gospel authors clearly present two ‘courts of reputation’. One, comprising those who are hostile to Jesus, typically includes religious and civil leaders, family, ‘self’ and Satan. The other, the ‘divine’ court, includes God the Father, Jesus, the Spirit and angels. Jesus especially is praised and associated with glory and honour. The texts function as ‘honour discourse’ by challenging their audience to disregard the former court of reputation (i.e., to



The chiastic form of the saying alerts the reader to the parallelism of ‘coming after’ with following, and the parallelism of ‘denying oneself’ with ‘taking up the cross’. In order to enter a committed discipleship, Jesus requires both self-denial and cross-bearing. The basic meaning of ἀπαρνέομαι (and its simplex form ἀρνέομαι) is to ‘say no’, to deny something by giving a negative verbal answer to a question (e.g., 14:68) or by an act of refusal (as in Heb 11:24, referring to Moses’ refusal of Egyptian honours) or renunciation (e.g., Isa 31:7 LXX, with idols as the object). These instances reflect the classical usage. However, the NT and later Christian writings extend the meaning of this verb by using it with reference to denying a *person*, that is, Jesus (14:30, 72; Acts 3:13, 14). Only in Mark 8:34 and parallels, and in 2 Tim 2:12, 13, is the object of the verb ‘oneself’. This speaks of one’s relationship to oneself, and assumes that people have the ability to transcend themselves and act to their own apparent disadvantage.<sup>121</sup>

The subsequent saying gives a reason (γὰρ) for the self-denial saying and an explanation of it: ‘For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it’ (8:35). Here ψυχή is one’s total self.<sup>122</sup> The words ‘for my sake’ (ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ) importantly indicate the christological focus of self-denying behaviour, setting it apart from secular forms of altruism.<sup>123</sup> That is, willingness to bear the cross of Christ and to lose one’s life (i.e., to ‘deny oneself’) is contingent on a fundamental loyalty to Jesus. Jesus and all that

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‘deny themselves’) and to have regard for the latter, divine, court of reputation. They do this by affirming the honour of those who ‘deny themselves’ and align themselves with Jesus, by promising eschatological honour (and dishonour for others), and by reinterpreting the experiences of worldly dishonour as divine honour (e.g., death as ‘glorification’, and loss of life as the saving of life).

<sup>121</sup> John Fenton, “A Time for Fasting?” in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses*, ed. John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), 66.

<sup>122</sup> In Luke 9:25 the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτόν is used instead of ψυχή, with the same verb, making the expressions parallel.

<sup>123</sup> The phrase appears in various forms elsewhere: on account of Jesus and his name, his followers will leave homes and families (10:29), be hated by all (13:13), and be delivered up to hostile authorities (13:9).

he represents (the gospel and the kingdom of God) is to be held in such honour that all else, including suffering and the possibility of death, is of lesser importance.

The causative γὰρ in the succeeding saying (8:36, 37) again serves to link it to the self-denial saying in an explanatory way: ‘For what does it profit one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what will one give in exchange for his life?’ The concepts are presented as two rhetorical questions in economic terms that relativise the accumulation of wealth and worldly honour. The final climactic saying in the group (8:38) points (again using γὰρ) to the ultimate loss of life which will be suffered by those who are unwilling to deny themselves: eschatological judgement, expressed here in terms of shame at the appearing of the Son of Man in his glory.

Self-denial, then, is a radical renunciation of one’s own claims on life, wealth and worldly honour. It amounts to a revaluation of one’s temporal life, one’s goals and priorities—in fact, a relativisation (or decentering) of one’s self as a holistic response of attachment to Jesus, to whom the disciple owes loyalty and honour. The ‘self’ is not obliterated or lost, but is reoriented, as exemplified by Jesus’ own submission to God: ‘Not what I want, but what you want’ (14:36). Jesus is, in fact, the ultimate model of self-denial: he does not ‘save his life’ at the cross (15:31) but loses it for the sake of others (10:45).<sup>124</sup>

This perspective is confirmed by Mark’s negative critique of self-exaltation, the antithesis of self-denial. The disciples, concerned about who among them is greatest (9:34), need to learn that ‘whoever wants to be a leader (πρῶτος) must be last of all and servant (διάκονος) of all’ (9:35). This is an expanded form of the saying in 10:31 (‘Many who are first will be last, and the last first’) which overturns

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<sup>124</sup> See further John Vincent, “Losing Life, Gaining Life,” in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses* (London: SPCK, 2006), 68–78. For the term ‘decentering’ I acknowledge Volf, *Exclusion*, 69–71, who draws attention to Paul’s similar but more explicit formulation of self-denial as crucifixion: ‘I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live ... the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:19–20).



the conventional idea that wealth is a sign of standing with God. The concept is further expanded in 10:43, 44—in response to his disciples' aspiration to places of honour (10:37) Jesus asserts that those who would become great (μέγας) must become servants (διάκονος), and those who would be first (πρῶτος) must be slaves (δοῦλος) to all.

Mark's 'model readers', then, are characterised as those whose submission to self, Satan and society has been transformed into submission to Jesus. Loyalties and obligations to natural family and to other traditional structures have been transferred to Jesus, in appropriate acknowledgement of the honour of Jesus and of the honour which God bestows on his disciples. Self-interest has become self-denial, which will involve voluntary dispossession of goods and relationships. I will mention this dispossession again in connection with the transformation of community, but I note here that it is one of the components of the suffering that comes with discipleship.

### Suffering

As well as the loss of material benefits and personal attachments (10:29-30), the Gospel puts forward the real possibility of tribulation (θλίψις) and persecution (διωγμός) (4:17); disciples will 'drink the cup' of suffering (10:38, 39) and be hated, flogged, betrayed and killed (13:9-13) by those who have not responded positively to the 'good news' of Jesus.<sup>125</sup> All this is gathered in the image of 8:34, 'taking up the cross', which implies that suffering is not so much a byproduct of discipleship as an essential element of it. This theme is not elaborated; Jesus simply urges his followers to endure (13:13) and promises that help will be 'given' by the Holy Spirit (13:11). Inasmuch as suffering may promote an attitude of utter dependence on God ('not my will, but Yours' [14:36]), it clearly has a formative role in the ongoing transform-

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<sup>125</sup> See Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 133-36.

ation of disciples, and may also be the means by which the genuineness and permanence of transformation is tested.

To summarise, then, Mark's vision of the person who has received and responded positively to the message of the Gospel is of a transformed individual who has entered, through repentance and forgiveness, into a new familial relationship with God mediated by Jesus and characterised by faith and prayer. The person experiences tokens of salvation in the present, but hopes for the eschatological manifestations of total health in mind, spirit and body, and the quality of eternal life. Entrance into this relationship requires a transference of allegiance—a movement towards childlikeness in the sense of relinquishing all claims to achievement and worldly esteem. The language of self-denial expresses essentially the same kind of relativisation for the sake of relationship to God and conformity to life lived within the kingdom of God. Mark's Gospel presents this vision, including the suffering it may bring, as a possibility for all.

## 5.6 The transformed community

### Anthropology and ethics

I have been exploring personal transformation in the individual reader of the Gospel. For Mark, however, following Jesus is not a solitary activity but a communal one.<sup>126</sup> In any case, *anthrōpos*, in the sense of humankind, is a collective term. It is therefore essential to delineate the communal aspects of Mark's vision, and so my account of

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<sup>126</sup> 'In every case the images employed in Mark to represent Christian existence are corporate.' Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 107.



the ‘model reader’ must proceed towards an account of the ‘model community’ of which that reader is a part.

Part of my description will draw attention to the major ethical imperatives that the Gospel presents for the community, that is, how the community should conduct itself. I will proceed on the assumption that theological anthropology cannot be satisfactorily treated without granting full recognition to theologically-motivated ethics.<sup>127</sup> However, rather than attempting a full exploration of Markan ethics, I will limit my investigation to the theological and anthropological foundations of such ethics, which I will consider under the rubric of ‘relational anthropology’.

### **An eschatological community in the making**

The Gospel narrates quite early (1:16-20; 2:14; 3:13-19) the constitution of the new community of disciples through Jesus’ calling. This group is the founding nucleus of the post-Easter Christian community that will ‘preach the gospel to all nations’ (13:10). Jesus’ address to this group of disciples at times widens to include ‘all’ (e.g., 13:37), and so for this reason it can be seen as ‘paradigmatic of the wider gospel movement which comprises all who adhere to Jesus’ message in faith’.<sup>128</sup>

The creation of the new community happens, in a sense, *ex nihilo*, for Jesus gathers its members from a variety of life situations, although they are all presumably Galileans. He gathers not ‘individualised’ converts but ‘individuals who converge with others around his vision for Israel’.<sup>129</sup> The first steps of the group’s formation involve its members in transformative processes of decontextualisation

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<sup>127</sup> For a more detailed outline of Mark’s ethics, see Via, *Ethics*, 81–100. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 295, comments on the integration of theology and ethics in Paul: the rhetorical ‘theologising’ that transforms the Christ-believers’ identity has, as its ultimate goal, ethical practice. This is equally applicable to Mark’s Gospel.

<sup>128</sup> C.D. Marshall, *Faith*, 159.

<sup>129</sup> Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 178.

and disengagement from aspects of their old lives. This disorientation means, for some, that they revalue family ties (1:18-20; 10:28-30) as Jesus himself has done (3:31-35). For others it means that they relinquish wealth (10:21, 23, 29; cf. 8:36). But the process also involves recontextualisation—a reorientation that incorporates the disciples into a new structure of fictive kinship based on obedience to God (3:35). Jesus begins to train them to be a witnessing community (6:7-13).

Howard Kee correctly asserts that the central feature of Mark's Gospel as an apocalyptic text is the community.<sup>130</sup> However, his view that Mark's text is a 'portrayal of his community', that is, the historical community from which the author himself writes, is contestable. Along with other criticisms of Kee's approach, Via writes:

There is also a problematical aspect to Kee's treatment of the text, namely, that he does not always clearly distinguish between statements about what the community was and statements about what the narrator thought it ought to be. This gives the impression that he sees the community to be what the text thinks it ought to be, but that may not be the case.<sup>131</sup>

The historical community has been confused with the 'model community' Mark envisages. In fact, Mark makes no claim to be characterising any specific flesh and blood community, and the Gospel makes sense as a narrative about Jesus set in Jesus' own time. It is more accurate to describe the Gospel as rhetoric penned for the purpose of personal and communal transformation of people. Mark's vision of an 'implied community' never reaches realisation within his Gospel, but it is foreshadowed by the group of people who follow Jesus in the narrative. Because the Gospel 'stands at the very beginning of the process of world-building', and precisely because it does not portray a specific real community, it gives little indication of how the new Christian social economy will operate in practice, that is, the extent to which the ideals of Jesus are in evidence in the practice of the community.<sup>132</sup> While

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<sup>130</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 106–07.

<sup>131</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 74.

<sup>132</sup> Riches, "Synoptic Evangelists," 221–22.



we are not able to specify the historical identity of ‘Mark’s community’, it is probably true to say that Mark was a member of some post-Easter Christian community for whom his Gospel is an expression of its worldview, and that the text confirms to that community and to others their identity as groups that ‘bear the name of Christ’ (9:41) and that exist for the sake of Christ and the gospel (8:35; 10:29).

Kee is correct to call Jesus’ followers the ‘community of the new age’, for there is a strong ‘eschatological prospect’.<sup>133</sup> Mark’s Jesus assumes that there is and will be a real community, but that this community is and will be ‘between the times’. He points ahead to an expected culmination of the reign of God in a future time (e.g., 10:30; 12:23-25), when there will be celebration (14:25) as well as judgement (9:47-48). The community shares this hopeful, watchful expectancy of a full flowering of the kingdom (13:33-37). In the meantime, a new eschatological lifestyle is available as a partial realisation of the reign of God.

### **Images of the eschatological community**

For this new community Mark uses at least four different images or metaphors that are instructive for their implications regarding the community’s identity and its transformation.

#### *1. Family*

The gathered group of Jesus’ followers is given a new identity: Mark portrays the new community as a redefined family.<sup>134</sup> The idea is introduced in 3:31-35, where Jesus leaves his family waiting outside the house while indicating that his present

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<sup>133</sup> Hans F. Bayer, “The Eschatological Prospect in the Context of Mark,” in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 74–84.

<sup>134</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 71, identifies ‘redefinition of the community’ as one of the key aims of an apocalyptic worldview. See also Barton, *Discipleship*.

audience of disciples are 'my mother and my brothers'. This is a defining moment for the community of those who 'do God's will': Jesus views them as a 'family' that has, for him, priority over his own natural (uncomprehending) family, who have shown that they misunderstand him and his purpose (3:21). The saying in Mark 6:4 ('A prophet is not without honour except in his home town, among his kinsfolk and in his own house') underlines the disruption of relationships that springs from a clash of perspectives. Facing marginalisation and hostility from his family, Jesus becomes a paradigm for the disciples, for he expects that his followers will be subject to persecution and ostracism from their families (10:30; 13:12).

However, apart from the pressures of opposition, Jesus makes it clear that detachment from one's family is an appropriate response to the reign of God. He does this implicitly in his 'self-denial' sayings (8:34-38), where the 'self' is bound up with social attachments, and explicitly in conjunction with his requirement that his disciples voluntarily dispossess themselves of family relationships as well as goods (10:29-30). Through the story of Jesus and the rich man (10:17f) Mark establishes relinquishment of wealth as the criterion for receiving the blessings of life in the kingdom, both 'in this time and in the age to come' (10:30). The disciples seem to have gone some way in fulfilling this condition, for they have 'left everything' to follow Jesus (10:28).<sup>135</sup> Jesus' reply indicates 'hypercompensation'<sup>136</sup> for those who leave family, homes and lands for his sake. The hyperbole of rewards includes new 'family' relationships (mothers, brothers, sisters and children) and goods, echoing the vast fruitfulness of the seed sown in good soil (4:8, 20) and the multiplication of the loaves and fish (6:33-44; 8:1-9).

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<sup>135</sup> 'The twisted dynamic of subjection to possessions is replaced by subjection to an unconstrained Other.' Berger, *Identity*, 246.

<sup>136</sup> David M. May, "Leaving and Receiving: A Social-Scientific Exegesis of Mark 10:29-31," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17 (1990): 148.



What is this new fictive family like? The lack of fathers in the list provides a clue to the nature of the new community. The patriarchal role will be filled by God, the 'Father in heaven' (11:25). This conception of family is in tension with the hierarchical Roman view, which emphasised the authority of the *paterfamilias*. The more egalitarian relationship of 'brotherhood' is strongly evident in Paul's writings: in his letter to Philemon, even the master and the slave have become 'siblings'.

How, then, is the 'model community' to receive this 'family' concept? There are several considerations that prevent us from postulating a complete break with the natural family. First, Peter had a house and presumably a wife (1:29-30). Second, the authors of the NT letters (e.g., 1 Cor 7:12-16; 1 Pet 3:1-6) did not advocate leaving households upon becoming Christians.<sup>137</sup> Third, although the breaking of family ties was of radical significance in the ancient Mediterranean world, where duty to family was a priority,<sup>138</sup> Jesus' demand was not unprecedented in the traditions and practices of either Judaism or of the Graeco-Roman world as a whole.<sup>139</sup> For example, Deuteronomy 33:9 witnesses to a higher allegiance to YHWH than to the claims of kindred.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that, despite the real possibility of family disruptions, the primary summons to Mark's audience is 'from a lesser

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<sup>137</sup> Halvor Moxnes, "What is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997), 37; John M.G. Barclay, "The Family as the Bearer of Religion in Judaism and Early Christianity," in the same volume, notes (73-75) that the practical effect of the early Christian movement was to undermine family loyalties for a significant proportion of its adherents. However, natural kinship communities later played a large part in the expansion of the larger Christian community, as Christians met within the households of their socially significant members.

<sup>138</sup> See, e.g., Jerome H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss of Honour: The Cultural Context of the Original Markisms in Q," in *Modelling Early Christianity*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995). Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 169, points out that Jesus' words create a 'radical rupture of the fabric of cultural loyalties'.

<sup>139</sup> Stephen C. Barton, "The Relativisation of Family Ties in the Jewish and Greco-Roman Traditions," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997), 81-100.

piety to a greater piety'.<sup>140</sup> The natural family is relativised rather than necessarily forsaken. Believers are bound together in a new community that not only questions the priority of allegiance to one's natural family, but also demonstrates in its relationships and functioning some characteristics of a family. That is, the new community is a metaphorical (or fictive) family. As Barton neatly summarises, 'the "anti-family" material in the Gospels is primarily a rhetorically powerful metaphorical way of calling for the displacement of every obstacle to true discipleship of Jesus in the light of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God'.<sup>141</sup> In a 'fundamental transfer of primary allegiance and commitment',<sup>142</sup> the community experiences a new non-biological kinship based on a shared discipleship of Jesus. For those who have entered the community, this represents a transformation of identity. As Berger notes, the human will is not strong enough to shatter the firm attachments that human beings make; this detachment (and re-attachment) requires the creative power of God, for whom 'all things are possible' (10:27).<sup>143</sup>

## 2. Flock

In the Hebrew scriptures the image of sheep is used to portray Israel, and in later NT writings the sheep metaphor is commonly used to portray the church.<sup>144</sup> This image appears in 14:27, where Jesus explicitly refers to his disciples as sheep: 'You will all fall away, because it is written, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered".' Mark's audience will hear how the disciples fled (14:50) but they know that after the resurrection of Jesus the disciples were regathered, as Mark hints in his next sentence (14:28; cf. 16:7). Indeed, the use of the verb προάγω here

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<sup>140</sup> Barton, "Relativisation," 99.

<sup>141</sup> Barton, "Relativisation," 81.

<sup>142</sup> Barton, *Discipleship*, 20.

<sup>143</sup> Berger, *Identity*, 151–52.

<sup>144</sup> E.g., Lk 12:32; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Jn 10:1ff; Heb 13:20; Rev 7:17. On this image, see further Best, *Following Jesus*, 210; Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 110.



maintains the image of the shepherd leading his sheep.<sup>145</sup> The sheep and shepherd saying is a quotation of Zechariah 13:7, which describes the judgement about to fall on Israel because of its apostasy; the subsequent material predicts that (in Kee's words) 'only a remnant of the covenant people will survive to share in the blessings of the new age. They will be tested as by fire, and in their purified state will become in truth God's people.'<sup>146</sup> This depicts the eschatological community enduring persecution.

Sheep and shepherd imagery is used also in 6:34, where the crowd for whom Jesus has compassion is likened to 'sheep without a shepherd'.<sup>147</sup> The crowd here is a gathering of disciples in the sense that they have 'run from all the cities', eagerly seeking to follow Jesus and listen to him. Jesus, in the role of the shepherd, treats them as his flock and begins to teach them and then to feed them (another metaphor for teaching). The mention of 'green grass' (6:39) is likely to recall the pastoral imagery of Psalm 23:2.<sup>148</sup>

Probably of most importance for the 'sheep' of the new community is the belief that there is a shepherd who has gathered them into a new flock and who continues to care for them.

### 3. *Temple*

A less obvious identification of the community can be discerned in Mark's use of temple language. In 11:12-25 Jesus criticises the functioning of Jerusalem's temple for failing to live up to its purpose of being 'a house of prayer for all the nations'

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<sup>145</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 288.

<sup>146</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 110.

<sup>147</sup> This figure appears in several places in the OT, e.g., Num 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron 18:16; Ezek 34:8f; Zech 10:2. Its use here surely carries the implication that the Jewish leaders are *false* shepherds, although Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 406, views the Mosaic connection as the most relevant one to the context of the feeding miracle.

<sup>148</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 131.

(11:17). The fig tree episodes that enclose this condemnation make it clear that Jesus is prophesying the demise of the temple.<sup>149</sup> Witnesses later report, falsely but ironically, that Jesus said, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands’ (14:57, 58, cf. 15:29). The eschatological replacement for the temple is often taken to be the resurrected Jesus himself. Indeed, John 2:21 says as much, and Mark 12:10 (‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone’) implies it.

However, early Christian literature often attests to the identification of the Christian community as the new temple, with Christ as the foundation.<sup>150</sup> A significant number of commentators acknowledge that such an identification is discernible already in Mark’s Gospel.<sup>151</sup> Sharyn Dowd argues that the withered fig tree pericope functions in Mark 11 both to foreshadow the destruction of the temple and to illustrate the power of God promised to the community that replaced the rejected temple as ‘house of prayer’.<sup>152</sup> Alan Culpepper suggests that Mark 12:10 prepares the reader to connect the death of Jesus with the building of a new temple.<sup>153</sup> Michael Bird points out that ‘temple’ or ‘house’ is often symbolic of the renewed Israel, the Qumran sectarians particularly viewing themselves as the eschatological temple;<sup>154</sup> he argues that Jesus and his disciples possess a *raison d’être* analogous to that of the temple, offering forgiveness, commensality, divine presence and healing (2:5; 6:13), but circumventing the temple as the means of divine access.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> W.R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

<sup>150</sup> E.g., Jn 1:14; Acts 15:16-18; 1 Cor 3:9-11; 16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22; Rev 3:12. Gal 2:9 and 1 Clem 5:2 both speak of apostles as ‘pillars’ of the church.

<sup>151</sup> See Donald H. Juel, *Messiah and Temple* (Missoula, MO: Scholars Press, 1977), 145.

<sup>152</sup> Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer*, 37–55; see also Susan R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 120–24; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 302–03.

<sup>153</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, “Designs for the Church in the Gospel Accounts of Jesus’ Death,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 380.

<sup>154</sup> E.g., 1QS 5:5-6; 8:4-10.

<sup>155</sup> Bird, *Gentile Mission*, 155–61.



While this evidence is strongly suggestive, the identification is not explicit in the text. If perceptive members of the audience can appropriate such a self-understanding, they will know that they have become a community that mediates salvation, and that is inclusive of Gentiles—a renewed ‘house of prayer for all nations’.

#### 4. *The new Israel*

Mark’s designation of ‘the Twelve’, his references to ‘the elect’ and to a ‘new covenant’ perspective, and his many indications of a ‘new Exodus’ thematic suggest strongly that Mark views the community as the renewed Israel.

Following the revelation that the leaders of Israel have begun to plot Jesus’ death (3:6), Mark places the story in which Jesus chooses the same number of disciples as the number of Israel’s tribes.<sup>156</sup> The ‘making’ of the Twelve (ἐποίησεν δώδεκα, 3:14) recalls the language of LXX Isa 43:1 and 44:2 (ὁ ποιήσας σε) in relation to the creation of Israel. Mark maintains this association through his frequent references (ten times) to ‘the Twelve’.

Mark writes that Jesus ‘summoned those he wanted’ (3:13). This call constitutes an ‘election’ of the Twelve. God’s choice of Israel, classically formulated in Deuteronomy 7:6-11, is developed in the prophetic literature (especially in Isa 41:8-9; 43:10, 20; 44:1-2; 45:4) where the emphasis is on Israel’s role in future blessing to the nations. Mark, reflecting usage common to many NT writers (and to the Qumran community), has Jesus referring to the community as ‘the elect’ (οἱ ἐκλεκτοί) in 13:20, 22, 27.

The parabolic ‘vineyard’ (12:1-12), itself an image of God’s people, will be given to ‘others’ (12:9) following the death of the son at the hands of the cruel and

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<sup>156</sup> The correspondence is explicit in Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30; Rev 21:12-14. See W. Horbury, “The Twelve and the Phylarchs,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 503–27.

unscrupulous tenants, whom the leaders of Israel (11:27) recognise as referring to themselves (12:12). These ‘others’ would presumably be the new leaders of a new Israel, that is, the community of Jesus’ disciples.<sup>157</sup> The new community thus takes on the vocation and designations formerly reserved for national Israel.<sup>158</sup>

Mark’s only reference to covenant theology identifies Jesus’ blood as ‘blood of the covenant’ (14:24). The textual variants here witness to an early understanding of this as the *new* covenant. Key features of the ‘new covenant’ announced by Jeremiah are an emphasis on forgiveness (Jer 31:34) and the widened scope of the eschatological covenant community (‘remote parts of the earth’, Jer 31:8). Both of these are also key features of Mark’s Gospel.<sup>159</sup> The major prophets assert that the new covenant, an expression of YHWH’s intention to transform Israel, will be put into effect in history through a divinely-initiated programme; this has been called the ‘New Exodus’.

The significance of allusions to Exodus had not escaped previous scholars (e.g., the ἔρημος τόπος in Mark’s first feeding story [6:32, 35]).<sup>160</sup> However, only in the work of Rikki Watts has Mark’s appropriation of Isaiah’s New Exodus perspective been extensively explored.<sup>161</sup> Mark’s allusions evoke the first Exodus (which was the ‘founding moment’ of Israel) within a prophetic, future-oriented New Exodus schema. Several of these allusions have already been mentioned above. More important than the intertextuality, however, is the ideology that gives it significance; the ‘subtext’ is the relational dynamics between YHWH and Israel.<sup>162</sup> The New Exodus perspective is an organising theme for Mark’s thinking about Jesus

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<sup>157</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 219.

<sup>158</sup> Bird, *Gentile Mission*, 130–32.

<sup>159</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 113.

<sup>160</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 111–12. Also, importantly, Marcus, *Way*.

<sup>161</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*.

<sup>162</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 47–52.



and the church, and in such a perspective, the new community is the eschatological people of God.

Although this perspective is fairly ubiquitous in the Gospel, as Watts shows, it is arguable whether the readers will perceive the allusions. Watts acknowledges the necessity for readers or hearers to be ‘informed’,<sup>163</sup> but how ‘informed’ does a reader have to be? Here the probable diversity amongst the audience has to be acknowledged. It is likely that Mark expects at least some of his readers to have a deep interest in and knowledge of the OT.<sup>164</sup> However, as I have shown, the power of his rhetoric will not depend totally, or even primarily, on the intertextuality of the New Exodus ideology.

The ‘model community’, then, will be one in which members identify themselves as the eschatological people of God, in continuity with national Israel as regards vocation and relationship to God, and heirs of the eschatological kingdom. But it is also a *new* expression of Israel, a ‘remnant’ covenant community, aligned to the divine purpose.<sup>165</sup> Because that purpose is yet to be fully realised, the community is one that is both transformed and being-transformed.

### **Relational anthropology of the eschatological community**

I foreshadowed above a view of ethics as ‘relational anthropology’. This expression has recently gained currency in both theological and sociomedical spheres.<sup>166</sup> It implies a move away from the kind of anthropological reductionism that unduly emphasises human rationality, and a move towards a more holistic and personalist

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<sup>163</sup> Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 45, 52.

<sup>164</sup> Marcus, *Way*, 45, n. 121.

<sup>165</sup> As noted by Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 139, this continuity is such that ‘there is yet no divide between Christian and Jew’—the radical break lies in the future.

<sup>166</sup> E.g., Denise Ackermann, “Defining Our Humanity: Thoughts on a Feminist Anthropology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 79 (1992): 20–23.

anthropology that views the person as seeking wholeness in relationship.<sup>167</sup> Humanity is seen not so much in terms of ‘substance ontology’ as in ‘relational ontology’.<sup>168</sup> While it is widely acknowledged that theological anthropology has often included elements of relationality (e.g., Augustine, Luther, Barth),<sup>169</sup> the revival of relational trinitarian theology has opened the way for a more communitarian construction of theology<sup>170</sup> and a more relational approach to anthropology.<sup>171</sup> This perspective lies at the heart of McFadyen’s communication-focused anthropology.<sup>172</sup>

On this basis the following reflections will examine Mark’s vision of the ‘model community’ in terms of interpersonal relationships. In the Gospel some distinctive features of these relationships can be identified: love, servanthood, inclusion and peace are qualities essential to the character of the community.

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<sup>167</sup> Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995). See also David John Melling, “Act and Meaning,” *New Blackfriars* 51 (1970): 169–74; Norbert J. Rigali, “The Moral Act,” *Horizons* 10 (1983): 252–66.

<sup>168</sup> See F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), and Wisse’s review of this: Maarten Wisse, “Towards a Truly Relational Theology: A Conversation with F. LeRon Shults,” *Ars Disputandi* 4 (2004) (online journal, accessed October 2008). Wisse (n. 2) clarifies the terms I have mentioned: ‘An ontology of substance is an account of the being or identity of things in terms of their individual properties rather than their relations to other beings. A relational ontology, then, is an account of the being of things in terms of their relations to other things, or at least an account in which the relations of beings with each other constitute their being as an individual.’

<sup>169</sup> Matt Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on ‘Homo Incurvatus in Se’* (London: T&T Clark, 2006). Similarly, Spicq, *Dieu et l’Homme selon le Nouveau Testament*, 112: ‘L’homme biblique est essentiellement religieux. Il ne peut se définir que comme le terme d’une relation: un “vis-à-vis”, “l’homme devant Dieu”, ce que détermine simultanément sa petitesse et sa grandeur.’

<sup>170</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>171</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Edward Russell, “Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas’s Theological Anthropology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 2 (2003): 168–86.

<sup>172</sup> McFadyen, *Call*.



### 1. *A loving community*

Mark places on the lips of both Jesus and an insightful scribe a summons to radical love of God and others (12:28-34). These texts are reiterations of commandments found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ('You shall love the Lord your God') and Leviticus 19:18 ('You shall love your neighbour as yourself'). Their juxtaposition here is distinctive, and may well be original with Jesus.<sup>173</sup> 'Your neighbour' (πλησίον) would, for Jews, include fellow Israelites as well as non-Jews resident in Israel.<sup>174</sup> For Christians in Mark's time it would include people both inside and outside the believing community.<sup>175</sup> The Gospel tradition extends it to enemies (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27, 35).

As OT quotations these texts testify to a firm continuity with traditional Judaism, so that the commandments claim as much weight in the new community as they had in the old. The double commandment of love transcends all the other commandments as their essence and meaning,<sup>176</sup> and so focuses the community's cluster of moral principles towards its centre: wholehearted love for God and other people. What defines the community is not obedience to legal norms or adherence to ideas but a faithful and affective orientation to God and neighbours. There is no new content here, but the emphasis on the love commandments is rhetorically important. It summarises, reinforces and legitimates Jesus' previous teaching on commitment to God and to a life of self-denial and servanthood, and implicitly encourages the community to think and do likewise.

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<sup>173</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 569–70.

<sup>174</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 288.

<sup>175</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 86–87. Aristeas takes πλησίον to mean πάντες ἄνθρωποι; similarly Philo interprets the commandments in universal terms (Collins, *Mark*, 574–75).

<sup>176</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 345.

The scribe says that to so love God and neighbour is ‘much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices’ (12:33). Jesus’ commendation of the man’s insight (‘You are not far from the kingdom’, 12:34) is understated;<sup>177</sup> it effectively relativises the obligations of the cultic sacrificial system, though it does not necessarily negate them. Jews would have read it as giving the principle and purpose of Torah without undermining the necessity to keep all the laws.<sup>178</sup> This was already an OT theme (e.g., Hos 6:6 and 1 Sam 15:22) but the literary context here (between the ‘cleansing’ of the Temple and Jesus’ prediction of its destruction) may well imply that many laws need no longer to be kept assiduously (cf. other relaxations of law-keeping in the Gospel, e.g. 2:23-28 on sabbath observance). For Mark’s audience after the destruction of the Temple this would be especially so.

Mark does not provide a commentary on what love may look like in the community, but Jesus has been the model of its practice.<sup>179</sup> The healings, exorcisms and teachings have all been expressions of love, but apart from this passage, only in 10:21 is the word ‘love’ (ἀγαπάω) mentioned—Jesus is shown loving the rich man. Such love intends to lead the ‘neighbour’ to enter the kingdom, but the offer is not taken up. This suggests that the proclamation of the kingdom is an important way for the community to demonstrate love. Other ways would include prayer, forgiveness and service.<sup>180</sup> This amounts to discipleship, as Eugene Boring notes:

Like the OT and Judaism, the Markan Jesus teaches no ethics as such, but response in faith and love to the act of God. The Markan Jesus does not teach ethical principles, but reaffirms and radicalizes the biblical call of God to obedience—ethics is discipleship, and the Markan ethic makes sense only to those who respond to the Markan Jesus’ call to discipleship.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 577.

<sup>178</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 288.

<sup>179</sup> For an exploration of how Jesus is shown to fulfill these love commandments in his passion, see Keerankeri, *Love Commandment*, 189–238.

<sup>180</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 86–87.

<sup>181</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 347.



## 2. *A servant community*

The ‘model community’ will be one whose attitudes and practices parallel those of a servant. This is a relational metaphor that employs both of the terms δοῦλος and διάκονος. In 12:2-4 δοῦλος refers parabolically to those who have represented the ‘lord of the vineyard’ and have been slain, and 13:34 refers, again parabolically, to those who wait in eschatological expectation as slaves (δούλοι) who have responsibilities, especially in ‘keeping watch’. Both of these passages relate to conventional, dutiful and honourable functions of the ‘slaves’ with regard to the authority of the ‘master’, and are directly applicable to the Christian community.

However, the more important use of the metaphor specifies a subcategory of love, in that it envisions the voluntary acceptance of the lowly status of a διάκονος or δοῦλος, even one who is a servant ‘of all’:

You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men (μεγάλοι) exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great (μέγας) among you shall be your servant (διάκονος), and whoever wishes to be a leader (πρῶτος) among you shall be a slave (δοῦλος) of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served (διακονηθῆναι), but to serve (διακονῆσαι), and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:42-45)

There is a synonymous parallelism here: those who wish to become great/first must make themselves servants/slaves. Similarly, Jesus’ responds to the disciples’ discussion about who among them is greatest with the words, ‘Whoever wants to be a leader (πρῶτος) must be last (ἔσχατος) of all and servant (διάκονος) of all’ (9:35). These sayings put forth a strong contrast between the ways in which the world leaders rule (i.e., with the kind of coercive power exemplified by Herod [6:14-29] and Pilate [15:1-15]) and the subversive way toward which Jesus calls his disciples

to exercise authority (i.e., with voluntary self-donation).<sup>182</sup>

Jesus is himself the model of this attitude, for his death (which John and Paul identify as an act of love) is here identified as an act of self-donating service (10:45).<sup>183</sup> The disciples' thirst for power (10:37) begins to be transformed into a willingness to experience the same humiliation ('drinking the cup', 'being baptised') as Jesus will experience in his journey towards death (10:39). The power of the new community, then, will be found in this kind of servanthood, which is the power of self-denial for the sake of others, even to the extent of 'taking up the cross' (8:34).<sup>184</sup>

### 3. *An inclusive community*

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the new community is its inclusiveness. Mark's Gospel presents a remarkably consistent picture of Jesus as one who receives and welcomes others—ritually unclean individuals both male and female, those with all kinds of illnesses, tax-gatherers and 'sinners', demoniacs both Jewish and Gentile, a synagogue official, a rich man, and a Gentile Syrophoenician woman who knows she has the status of a dog before him. In the accounts there is much use of language depicting physical contact, especially taking by the hand and touching. 'All of Jesus' healing activities have, in one way or another, restored to the inside those who by the categories of the old system had been relegated to the outer fringes of, or excluded from, society.'<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Gerd Theissen, "The Political Dimension of Jesus' Activities," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 240–41, gives some instances of a tradition of 'servant' rulers in antiquity, but these, to a large extent, refer merely to the restrictions of law and position on the freedom of a ruler. The nature of Jesus' service is active and much more wide-ranging.

<sup>183</sup> For a recent extended exegesis of this passage see Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi, *But it is not so among you': Echoes of Power in Mark 10:32–45* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).

<sup>184</sup> Kaminouchi, *But It is not So Among You*, 206.

<sup>185</sup> Tate, *Handbook*, 459. Cf. Volf, *Exclusion*, 85: 'At the core of the Christian faith lies the persuasion that the "others" need not be perceived as innocent in order to be loved, but ought to be embraced even when they are perceived as wrongdoers.'



Jesus' welcome of children (9:36-37; 10:13-16) is, in a sense, not innovative, for the inclusion of children in the covenant is a familiar idea in Israel's scriptures. His prophetic gesture of embrace conveys an understanding of God as one who gathers in his children in love.<sup>186</sup> However, the status of children in the social climate of the first century was low.<sup>187</sup> By both word and action, Jesus relativises the conventional system of social recognition, acknowledging the worth of others regardless of status, and affirming that not only children but all those of low status or no status may be included in the new community.

Jesus' dealings with women implies that he expects them to be regarded as full members of the community. His uncompromising attitude to divorce (10:1-12) suggests that his concern is not so much for what is 'lawful' (10:2) but for the nature of the ideal community to which God calls people.<sup>188</sup> Here Jesus grants parallel rights to men and women. Kee comments that in this passage 'there is something close to full equality and mutual responsibility between members of both sexes'.<sup>189</sup>

Mark's Gospel is good news for Gentiles as well as for Jews, because Jesus' mission specifically includes them.<sup>190</sup> Best is probably correct when he writes, 'The union of Jew and Gentile in the new community may be part of the reason Mark has two feedings. That of the 5000 is for Jews and that of the 4000 for Gentiles; the two are then unified in one loaf (8:14-21).'<sup>191</sup> Certainly, the gathering of the elect 'from the ends of the earth' (ἀπ' ἄκρου γῆς, 13:27) pictures the wide diversity of the

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<sup>186</sup> James Francis, "Child Imagery in the Teaching of Jesus," privately obtained notes for Durham University NT Seminar, June 2003, 4. For example, Hosea 11:1-4 speaks of Israel as a child being loved by God, taught to walk and taken up in the arms of God: 'I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks; I bent down to them and fed them.' Ezekiel 16:3-8 speaks of Jerusalem as a newborn child of low origin, taken up and nurtured by God. In Mt 23:27 Jesus echoes this intention to gather Israel as children, as a hen gathers her chicks.

<sup>187</sup> Francis, "Children," 66-72.

<sup>188</sup> Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 175.

<sup>189</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 155.

<sup>190</sup> E.g., 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 7:31; 8:1-9; 13:10; 14:9.

<sup>191</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 218.

eschatological community, and recalls the promises of Isaiah 56:6-8 to gather into one community (σύναγωγή) not only Israel's diaspora but also foreigners (ἀλλογενῇ) and others from 'all peoples' (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν).<sup>192</sup> Jesus brings to a radical practical expression this heterogeneity that expands the traditional Jewish categories regarding who is clean or unclean,<sup>193</sup> including the boundary labels that rendered his eating with 'sinners' so shocking. The new community, therefore, will disregard the factional judgmentalism which takes into account the observance or non-observance of Pharisaic *halakhah*.<sup>194</sup> This reprioritisation would have social, communal and political implications; if 'sinners' were to be accepted within the community and at meal tables, it would mean a redrawing of norms and practice in social etiquette and behaviour.<sup>195</sup>

Jesus' acceptance of others operating in his name outside of the disciples' circle (9:38-40) demonstrates that he is not establishing a closed community with rigidly defined boundaries. His unconditional welcome is the foundation for Mark's vision of a community 'open across social, economic, sexual and ethnic barriers'.<sup>196</sup>

#### 4. *A peaceable community*

Although Mark's Gospel is full of conflict, one imperative specifies the non-conflictual quality of relationship to be maintained in the community: 'Be at peace (εἰρηνεύετε) with one another' (9:50). The saying echoes Jesus' blessing of peace (ὑπάγε εἰς εἰρήνην) to the healed woman in 5:34. This is, for her, a personal *shalom* which, in the society of believers, must be extended to become interpersonal. The collection of sayings in 9:33-50 expresses the need for acts of compassion (9:41) and

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<sup>192</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 115.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Wahlen, *Impurity*, 107.

<sup>194</sup> Dunn, "Jesus and Holiness," 186.

<sup>195</sup> Dunn, "Jesus and Holiness," 190.

<sup>196</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Community*, 97.



concern that the ‘little ones who believe’—the more fragile members of the community<sup>197</sup>—should not be caused to stumble (9:42). The exhortation to ‘be at peace with one another’ may well hark back to the disciples’ debate about ‘who is the greatest’ (9:33-34); the community is to operate without squabbling, rivalry or self-assertion.<sup>198</sup>

An important mechanism for maintaining peace in the community is specified in 11:25. Those who have ‘anything against anyone’ are to forgive them, releasing them from obligations. This hospitable attitude contrasts markedly with the more punitive disciplinary guidelines for intra-community relations at Qumran (1QS 6:24-7:27).

### **Transformation and the role of the eschatological community**

The above outline of the nature of the ‘model community’ raises the related questions of its role, purpose and aims. What are the implications of the transformation of the community for the wider context of human society? These questions lie within the ambit of theological anthropology, for they involve a particular vision of humanity from a divine perspective.

The sociopolitical conditions obtaining in Israel in Jesus’ time are presented in impressive detail by such scholars as Myers<sup>199</sup> and Horsley.<sup>200</sup> Mark’s Gospel severely critiques the Jewish rulership: Herod is arrogant, murderous and face-saving (6:14-29), the scribal Pharisees are schemers (3:6; 12:13), flatterers and hypocrites (12:14, 15) who exploit the poor (12:38-40) and are consistently opposed to Jesus, and the priestly aristocracy is manipulative (15:11), collaborative with the Romans and reliant on false testimony (14:55-60). In summary, the Jewish hierarchy

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<sup>197</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 192.

<sup>198</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 456.

<sup>199</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 413–47.

<sup>200</sup> Horsley, *Hearing*, 31-36, 121-176.

is corrupt ('leaven', 8:15), self-serving and concerned to maintain the *status quo*. To a lesser extent the Gospel also critiques the Roman imperial rulership; the shadow of the cross pervades the latter half of the Gospel and witnesses to the oppression and violence of Caesar's empire.

To all this deceit, coercion and abuse of power Mark's Jesus offers an alternative: 'It should not be that way among you' (10:43). What, then, is Jesus' vision, and what role does the community of his disciples play in it? Richard Horsley believes Jesus aimed to enact a programme of social renewal in the rural villages through revolutionary processes that would heal the effects of imperialism: the alien occupying forces must be expelled, and the Mosaic covenant renewed.<sup>201</sup> But Jesus' concern for 'the restoration of Israel' is more radical than a return to 'how things had been' in pre-occupation Israel. It does not extend to the restoration of the Temple, for the enacted parable of the fig tree predicts that the institution is to be dissolved, 'withered from the roots' (11:20); Mark subsequently relates the confirmation of this prediction in the tearing of the Temple curtain (15:38). And I have argued above (3.3) that treating the exorcisms as allegories of Roman expulsion is unwarranted.

Jesus does not envision 'regime change' in his society in the style of a rebel or a reformer. Jesus is resistant but non-violent: although he predicts the overthrow of the 'tenants of the vineyard' (12:9) and the destruction of the temple (13:2), he leaves the execution in God's hands. His exhortations toward change are not based on social, political or economic needs. Rather, his vision of restoration is theological: transformation occurs through 'belief in the gospel' (1:15) and through commitment to discipleship. His dichotomy between Caesar and God (12:13-17) is

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<sup>201</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 105–28. Horsley treats Jesus' healings and exorcisms as political allegories (107–8), interprets the Last Supper as Jesus' renewal of the Mosaic covenant (116), and denies that peasants would be interested in 'eternal life' (124). This book summarises the findings of his earlier work, *Hearing the Whole Story*; both have been rightly criticised as secularising and populist readings of the Gospel.



not one that justifies a sharply-defined separation between the spheres of politics and faith,<sup>202</sup> but it does demand a worldview that gives absolute priority to the ‘things of God’ (τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, 8:33; 12:17).

His vision of restoration is also eschatological: Mark 13 clearly envisages the passing away of this world along with the world of Rome and the temple, and the eschatological unity of Jew and Gentile has already been initiated in Jesus’ ministry. At the heart of the vision is an alternative understanding of the world in which divine government subverts the inadequate and misleading Jewish and imperial theologies.<sup>203</sup> The community is liberated from these oppressive ideologies by a radical reorientation to the Kingdom of God—the divine governance that transcends worldly systems.<sup>204</sup> This alternative understanding, which is a *metanoia*, a transforming of the mind,<sup>205</sup> leads to alternative practices that are God-centred and life-giving. Unconditional love for others becomes the new social norm.

Jesus envisions an eschatological community *within* the prevailing cultures (which will continue to be dominant), living with an awareness that the distinctive characteristics of its transformed culture will evoke misunderstanding, conflict and persecution (10:31; 13:9-13). Raymond Hobbs suggests a sociological model of ‘disengagement’ in which a conflict of moralities leads to a group’s withdrawal in the interests of self-preservation; the community’s strategy is ‘one of survival within an oppressive system, and not without criticism of that system’.<sup>206</sup> However, Myers

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<sup>202</sup> See Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) and the critique of this analysis by David L. Balch, *JBL* 106 (1987): 715-717.

<sup>203</sup> Kaminouchi, *But It is not So Among You*, 203.

<sup>204</sup> France, *Divine Government*, 60–63 Theissen, “Political Dimension,” 239, identifies Jesus’ alternative political vision as a ‘transformed ancient ideal of governance’.

<sup>205</sup> Christopher Burdon, “Mark and the Formation of Community,” in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses*, ed. John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), 185–87.

<sup>206</sup> T. Raymond Hobbs, “The Political Jesus: Discipleship and Disengagement,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 274.

contrasts the Christian community with the Essenes: rather than withdrawing, the Christian community continued to engage influentially with the society in general.<sup>207</sup>

The new worldview of the Christian community forms the foundation for the latent development of a new social order.<sup>208</sup> Although Mark's Gospel gives few hints of the practical (political and economic) outworking of this new order, the community has the potential to actualise and embody these transformed understandings that comprise the 'good news' it proclaims to the whole world. Here, perhaps, is where we find the significance of Jesus' saying, 'Have salt in yourselves' (9:50). A likely meaning of the metaphor is that the community has an 'eschatological responsibility'<sup>209</sup> to flavour society with its wisdom, purity and graciousness in dealings with others (cf. Col 4:6).<sup>210</sup>

## 5.7 Synthesis and conclusions

I have attempted to outline the shape of the theological anthropology embedded in the narrative and rhetoric of Mark's Gospel. Mark's concept of the essential *anthrōpos* makes use of conventional anthropological terms. Humanity is the creation of a beneficent God, placed in a derivative and subservient relation to God, and therefore limited and weak. However, Mark's emphasis on human failure, epistemological blindness and hardness of heart gives his view of humanity a predominantly pessimistic flavour. Humanity, universally and fundamentally distorted and in danger, needs to be rescued and restored. This perspective is a crucial element of the narrative grammar of Mark's Gospel and its core message.

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<sup>207</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 428.

<sup>208</sup> Riches, "Synoptic Evangelists," 220.

<sup>209</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 350.

<sup>210</sup> Evans, *Mark*, 73; Collins, *Mark*, 455.



Mark thus presents *anthrōpos* as anomalous, ambiguous and paradoxical: a complex being created worthy by God, but distorted from its original form; out of alignment with its intended function, yet possessing the potential for transformation into a renewed and realigned mode of existence that is in harmony with God, while living (not without conflict) in the midst of a first century world plagued by social, religious and political dysfunctionality. Mark's narrative moves back and forth between the two 'poles' that I have called distortion and restoration, but the overall pressure on the reader is to be transformed from the former to the latter.

The dynamism of this anthropology is driven by an eschatology that envisions a transformed humanity that will be fully manifested only in a future time. This expectation is linked inextricably with the proclamation of the new expression of the kingdom of God in the person and ministry of Jesus. Jesus' miracles are proleptic notifications of eschatological transformation that can, to a limited extent, be appropriated in the present experience of those who repent, understand and 'believe the gospel'. Such people, trusting in the work of God beyond the confines of the story,<sup>211</sup> 'enter the kingdom' and become disciples of Jesus. Mark's theological anthropology is thus an anthropology specifically oriented towards Christ.

My characterisation of humanity in terms of the 'model reader' (the constructed and idealised *anthrōpos* who will respond whole-heartedly to Mark's message) constitutes a coherent dynamic anthropology that is represented in individual and communal manifestations. Individually, the eschatological *anthrōpos* is a child of God and a brother of Christ within the fictive Christian family. Such a person has received forgiveness and salvation, and has undergone a transformation

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<sup>211</sup> Donald H. Juel, *The Gospel of Mark* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 189–92.

in self-understanding and a concomitant holistic reorientation of loyalties that gives priority to God.

The communal expression of this eschatological *anthrōpos* is the ‘model community’, which Mark portrays metaphorically as family and flock, ‘house of prayer’ and new Israel. His vision of this community’s interpersonal relationships constitutes a relational anthropology in which loving action, servanthood, inclusion and peace are distinctive qualities. This community embodies a transformed culture—a new ‘subcultural form of life in a pluralist society’<sup>212</sup>—that, while evoking misunderstanding and opposition, has the potential to change the world.

Tim Geddert, reflecting on the ending of Mark’s Gospel, aptly summarises Mark’s message: ‘Everyone misses the mark, and everyone is invited to start over in the power of the resurrected Jesus.’<sup>213</sup> This statement encapsulates not only the anthropological focus of the Gospel, but also its rhetorical thrust.

While I cannot claim that my construction of Mark’s anthropology is exhaustive, I submit that its shape is more complete than has hitherto been described because I have given fuller attention to the narrative and rhetorical elements of the Gospel. In particular, my identification of the ‘model reader’ with the eschatological *anthrōpos* has enabled a clearer recognition of the vision of humanity presented by Mark’s Gospel. The Gospel strongly implies that the specifications of this vision will be accessible to its readers and realisable in their experience. Its rhetoric challenges them to decide in favour of this vision of God-centred, eschatological, relational humanity, despite the cost and the danger (due to humanity’s deformity) that transformation brings.

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<sup>212</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, trans. John P. Galvin (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 397.

<sup>213</sup> Tim Geddert, “Beginning Again (Mark 16:1–8),” *Direction* 33, no. 2 (2004): 150–57 [http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1352, accessed 29.5.08]



## CHAPTER 6

### THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF MARK 5:1-20

‘To ask who we are, is to ask of what story we are a part.’<sup>1</sup>

‘We do not know what a human being is until we realise the destiny that God has created us for.’<sup>2</sup>

‘When we embrace Mark’s answer to the question, “Who do you say that I am?” we are not just making a theological affirmation about Jesus’ identity; we are choosing our own identity as well.’<sup>3</sup>

#### **Cognitive transformation: opening up a new world**

The New Testament texts owe their origin to transformation in the lives of their authors and of those who handed down the traditions to them. The documents are ‘the result of very real human processes which sought to *understand* and to *interpret* transforming experiences arising from the authoritative yet paradoxical presence of Jesus’.<sup>4</sup> The transformed authors sought to pass on to others what had been transformative for them. While Paul is explicit about this, Mark’s aim is implied yet clearly evident.

I introduced the expression ‘transformative potential’ in Chapter 1, noting that, in Ricoeur’s view, the transformative power of a text lies in its ability to open up to the reader a new world that may be entered. For Thiselton, the text enables the enlarging of the reader’s horizons or life-worlds, and the creation of new ones; the

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<sup>1</sup> Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 201, cited in Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric*, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Holmes, in Stephen Holmes and Russell Rook, eds., *What Are We Waiting For?: Christian Hope and Contemporary Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 79.

<sup>4</sup> Elna Mouton, “The Pathos of New Testament Studies: Of what use are we to the Church and its (public) ethos?” (2004), [http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/Departemente/DONT/elnamouton\\_intreerede.pdf](http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/Departemente/DONT/elnamouton_intreerede.pdf) (online article accessed 29.10.08).

process of transformation is a cooperative one in which the Spirit, the text, and the reader engage together.<sup>5</sup> The ‘illocutionary’ function of the text calls the readers to experience what the text sets forth.<sup>6</sup> Having considered in some detail how Mark’s Gospel functions in this way, I will briefly relate my findings to some studies of other NT texts.

Gerd Theissen was perhaps the first to apply psychological insights to the investigation of ways in which Paul’s letters might effect transformation in a reader’s experience and behaviour. From the perspective of learning theory he sees the gospel of Christ as offering an ‘unconditioned positive system of reinforcement’; from a psycho-dynamic point of view the gospel ‘enables previously unconscious aspects of life to become conscious’; and from a cognitive approach he sees Christ as a figure through whom ‘reality is perceived anew’—he enables transformation of both one’s relation to oneself and one’s assessment of interhuman solidarity.<sup>7</sup>

Expanding on Theissen’s categories, Alexandra Brown’s analysis of Paul’s rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 1-2 identifies the promotion of a ‘cognitive transformation’.<sup>8</sup> Paul’s argument there concerns the realm of human perception, cutting across accustomed ways of thinking, which he believes to be false, with the sharp expression of a new reality:

Paul’s aim in preaching the cross is to alter his hearers’ perception *of* the world in such a way as to alter their experience *in* the world. In the preaching of the cross, something is unveiled that moves the one who perceives it from one world to another, from the divided mind to the ‘mind of Christ’.<sup>9</sup>

Paul’s rhetoric includes both deconstructive and constructive elements. He first decentres the perceptions of the reader, setting the ‘wisdom of the world’ against the

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 619.

<sup>6</sup> Grant R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 390–91.

<sup>7</sup> Theissen, *Psychological Aspects*, esp. 394–98.

<sup>8</sup> Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized,” also Alexandra R. Brown, *Cross*.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized,” 741 (her emphases).



‘folly of the cross’ which is the ‘power of God’, and then leads the reader into the ‘transformed world’ in which the ‘mind of Christ’ is a ‘newly created perceptual organ’<sup>10</sup> and in which the Holy Spirit is the guide. For Paul, the ‘functional transforming agent’ of his discourse is ‘the word of the cross’, which is central to his *kerygma*.<sup>11</sup>

Like Paul’s, Mark’s discourse also points the hearer toward new realities governed by new images of who Jesus is (God is present in Jesus) and what faith in him can do for people. However, while Paul’s intention is clearly evident, and his forceful urgings towards the unity and reconciliation of his audience are explicit, Mark’s rhetoric is mediated differently and more subtly through narrative. His central transformative concept is the ‘good news’ of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as an eschatological reality; the kingdom of God is the catalytic agent of transformation. Paul uses the cross as the central symbol for this, while Mark highlights the significance of the cross through the dramatic impact of the narrative.

Nevertheless, Mark seems to aim at the same kind of ‘cognitive transformation’ of which Brown writes. Transformation, of course, may not *always* be dependent on cognitive awareness. Nevertheless, Mark brings the reader into the range of transformation, using deconstructive and constructive elements in ways similar to Paul’s, as he shows Jesus replacing old ideas with new ones (e.g., 2:18-28; 7:14-23). By a variety of means, including the imagery of blindness and deafness, his readers are dislodged from their customary perceptual world.

Elna Mouton’s analysis of the transformative potential of Ephesians reveals features that show striking similarities to Mark’s Gospel. The Ephesians are urged to change their view of humanity from an old conception ‘defined by exclusivity and separation (between people and God and between Jewish and Gentile believers)’ and

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<sup>10</sup> Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized,” 742.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandra R. Brown, “Seized,” 757.

by ‘an emphasis on cultic activities (covenant, circumcision, law, temple)’ to a new conception that is ‘an identity and ethos of inclusivity and unity’ with an emphasis on ‘relations in which people of different ethnic groups, gender and social status have been united with Christ into one body or household’.<sup>12</sup> They are to think of themselves in terms of the new and honourable position they have as one body in Christ—as a new humanity (εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, Eph 2:15). This new self-understanding leads to new attitudes and actions.<sup>13</sup> Mouton aptly generalises:

The life-changing power of the New Testament writings, their continuing authority across times and cultures, lie in their metaphorical ability to disclose (glimpses of) an alternative moral world—a radically new perspective on reality, a new way of living in the world.<sup>14</sup>

This kind of analysis is just as valid for Mark’s Gospel, where the ‘new world’ is the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Although Mark’s anthropology is not presented as explicitly as Paul’s, largely because of the difference in genre, his text shares the outlines of the same transformational perspective.

Paul himself effectively makes reference to the transformative potential of the gospel. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, to see Jesus (to perceive him rightly) is to be transformed (μεταμορφόομαι). The transformation is mediated by the Holy Spirit and is in the direction of Christ-likeness—a humanity that is shared with Jesus and characterised by ‘glory’. The ‘vision’ comes by indirect means (‘as in a mirror’), that is, hearing the word of the εὐαγγέλιον (2 Cor 4:3-6).<sup>15</sup>

Lewis Snyder’s brief analysis of the rhetoric of the Book of Revelation draws similar conclusions: its rhetoric urges its readers to adopt a transcendent worldview that resolves previously perceived contradictions. The author encourages them to ‘change the labels they have been used to using, and to use more appropriate labels

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<sup>12</sup> Mouton, “Transformative Potential,” 122.

<sup>13</sup> Mouton, “Transformative Potential,” 135.

<sup>14</sup> Mouton, “Transformative Potential.”

<sup>15</sup> See Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 204–09.



when forming their own identity: he would have them experience a reconfiguration of themselves,' and this will amount to a transformation of their existence.

By calling attention to this transcendent reality, John also invites his readers to reconstrue their values ... If humans may be defined by telling a story about their creation (as in Genesis) they surely may be redefined and recreated by the winsome story of their next transformation.<sup>16</sup>

The eschatology of this text is explicit, but that of Mark is no less transformative, providing in his pre-resurrection story, as I have shown, the foundational elements of an eschatological anthropology.

'The world according to Mark is a world torn open by God ... a story of God's powerful incursion into the created order.'<sup>17</sup> The heavens are torn apart at Jesus' baptism (1:10) and the curtain of the Temple is torn in two at his death (15:38).<sup>18</sup> Mark's Gospel announces a new world, and challenges its readers to reconsider who they will be and how they will live in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

### **Transformative reading: stepping into a new world**

The focus of this project has been on 'the world of the text' of Mark's Gospel—its purpose, its rhetoric and its anthropology—that is, on the *sense* of the text (what it says). However, for any reader, the meaning of the text lies in the dialectic between its sense and its *reference*.<sup>19</sup> For the author of the Gospel, the broad reference—the reality to which it testifies—is the eschatological reality of the risen Jesus and the new life of discipleship that is urged upon the reader. The transformative potential of the text is realised when the reader connects experientially with this reality.

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis Leroy Snyder, "The Rhetoric of Transcendence in the Book of Revelation," in *Rhetorics and Hermeneutics: Wilhelm Wuellner and His Influence*, James D. Hester and J. David Hester (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 216–17.

<sup>17</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 88.

<sup>18</sup> On this see Bird, "Tearing".

<sup>19</sup> Schneiders, "Gospels," 106. Schneiders uses these terms as defined by Ricoeur.

The reader appropriates the text, perceiving the world that the text projects as a possible alternative reality, and then entering it.<sup>20</sup> Schneiders understands such appropriation first as ‘aesthetic surrender’ in which the reader gives himself or herself to the text and allows it to speak, and second as ‘existential interpretation’ in which the reader’s horizon fuses with that of the world projected by the text, enabling a personal engagement from which he or she emerges changed.<sup>21</sup>

The essence of this ‘hermeneutic of transformation’ is shared in various forms by many scholars. Walter Wink pioneered a protest against the dominance of the kind of historical-critical exegesis that marginalises an engagement of the whole self with scripture; those who regard the biblical text as sacred and revelatory must interact with it (and allow it to impact them) in personal and transformative ways.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Via writes of the ‘realisation’ of the Gospel narrative as its interpretation is completed only in the acts of the interpreter.<sup>23</sup>

Theodore Stylianopoulos explores the transformative function of Christian scripture from an Orthodox perspective, proposing a multilevel hermeneutic: after the exegetical level (objective description of the author’s own understanding) and the interpretive level (full engagement with the world and interests of the reader) comes the third level, the transformative, in which the reader is faced with the issue of personal response, reflecting on the dynamics of how scripture is actualised in personal and corporate life, that is, how it becomes the word of the living God in the present. The task of reading scripture is not complete until all three levels have been addressed.<sup>24</sup> This perspective coheres well with that of Schneiders, for whom an

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<sup>20</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 167.

<sup>21</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 172–79.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973); Walter Wink, *Transforming Bible Study* (London: SCM, 1981)

<sup>23</sup> Via, *Ethics*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics*, vol. 1 of *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective* (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997), 187–238.



integral part of the work of interpretation is the reader's *experience* of the text and an active engagement with its truth claims.<sup>25</sup>

Behind all of my work on this project lies a 'hermeneutic of transformation' in the sense that I have assumed that Mark's Gospel would be received this way by many of its first readers. As McVann writes, the Gospel is not only a 'history' of Jesus; it becomes a narrative redescription of the reader's own experience of faith and new life (as, for example, the readers see themselves in the characters) and, through the reading, encounters with Jesus lead to a reconstitution and redefinition of human personhood that is based on relationship to and interaction with Him.<sup>26</sup>

Yet another fruitful way of realising the transformative potential of the Gospel is to approach it via the metaphor of interpretation as 'performance'. This idea, proposed by Nicholas Lash<sup>27</sup> and developed by Frances Young<sup>28</sup> and Stephen Barton,<sup>29</sup> refers not to the dramatic way in which a text may be presented in front of an audience, but to interpretive action that embodies the testimony of the text in one's day-to-day personal and social reality. Stepping beyond a cognitive appreciation of the text, the reader becomes an 'apprentice' together with others in the community of disciples.<sup>30</sup>

To 'perform' the anthropological vision of Mark's Gospel is to practise becoming the restored eschatological *anthrōpos* implied by the text. To use another

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<sup>25</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 173, 180.

<sup>26</sup> McVann, "Dwelling," 229, 231.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Lash, "Performing the Scriptures," in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), 37–46.

<sup>28</sup> Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Stephen C. Barton, "New Testament Interpretation as Performance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999): 179–208.

<sup>30</sup> Barton, "Performance," 208. Cf. Seth L. Sanders, "Performative Exegesis," in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April D. DeConick (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 57–79, whose study of apocalyptic visionary texts points to 'performative exegesis' as a pathway to transformative religious experience. 'The interpretation of texts is a way of changing history', as life roles are 'exegetically read out of texts' (79).

musical analogy, the eschatological *anthrōpos* in its fully transformed state is the symphony in the mind of the Composer, and its full actualisation (its optimal performance) awaits the fullness of the kingdom of God. The first-century ‘model reader’ will ‘perform’ the work according to the conventions and cultural limitations of his or her times, as will the contemporary reader, but the performance in both cases will be analogous to that of a reduced score played on flawed instruments.

### **Difficulties for today’s readers**

I have attempted to place Mark’s ‘model reader’ firmly in the context of first-century followers of Jesus, but I foreshadowed at the outset (p. 2) the importance of the reception of Mark’s Gospel by contemporary readers seeking foundations for self-understanding. In the current postmodern context in which identity issues can be problematic, Mark’s rhetoric invites twenty-first century responses. Can the anthropology of the Gospel be accessed in the 21st century? And what is the value of Mark 5:1-20 in such an application?

I have shown that Mark 5:1-20 has a significant function in the rhetoric of the Gospel. As such, it has transformative potential. As in the individual Psalms, for example, where the ‘I’ becomes, in the reading, the reader himself or herself, so the reader of the Gerasene story, through imagination, is able to unite with the characters in the story and with the ‘model reader’ whom the text addresses, asking, ‘Where am I in the story?’ Of course, different interpreters will allow the text to be transformative in different ways, according to their perceptions, commitment and faith—a universalised interpretation ‘neutralises’ the text.<sup>31</sup> However, if readers are able to appreciate the eschatological anthropology of the Gospel as a whole, their response is likely to be strongly shaped not only by Mark’s presentation of Jesus as

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Barton, “Performance,” 204.



the divine eschatological victor who is worthy to be followed, and also by his presentation of the radical transformation of the demoniac. The story inextricably links christology, cosmology and anthropology. Believing readers recognise the possibility of radical changes in the experience and direction of their own lives. For them, Jesus is a ‘new interpreter of life’, and the Gerasene demoniac functions as one who both illustrates the transformative ministry of Jesus and also models a faithful response.

Some readers today will have little difficulty appropriating the story in these terms. However, if, as I have suggested, Mark’s text required some knowledge of older texts in order to be fully comprehensible to his original readers, this requirement is heightened for today’s readers, for whom the OT texts are even more remote. Moreover, the first century world of the Gospel, in which demons can possess people and drive pigs to destruction, is a strange, foreign world to sophisticated westerners, most of whom would regard such a world as possessed of a superstitious prescientific imagination.

Some scholarly interpretations of the Gerasene story, therefore, owe much to a large degree of skepticism regarding demons. Various kinds of sociopolitical and psychological interpretations have been offered.<sup>32</sup> Some of these provide a treatment of the story as part of a coherent reading of the Gospel as a whole.<sup>33</sup> However, most

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<sup>32</sup> A full discussion of psychological and sociopolitical readings and their philosophical underpinnings is outside the scope of this project. For approaches to the topic see Stephen C. Barton, “Thinking About Demons and the Demonic,” *Theology* 111 (2008): 83–92. Sociopolitical readings include Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs”; Paul W. Hollenbach, “Help for Interpreting Jesus’ Exorcisms,” *SBL 1993 Seminar Papers* (1993); Hamerton-Kelly, *Gospel and the Sacred*. Psychological readings include Leenhardt, “Exegetical Essay”; Twelftree (*Jesus the Exorcist*, 73) provides a list of others who have interpreted the story psychologically: M.M. Baird, “The Gadarene Demoniac,” *ExpT* 31 (1920): 189; L. Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 62ff; T. Hawthorn, “The Gerasene Demoniac: A Diagnosis,” *ExpT* 66 (1954): 79–80. More recently, Eugen Drewermann, *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1984).

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*; Hamerton-Kelly, *Gospel and the Sacred*; Horsley, *Hearing*.

psychological readings of 5:1-20 treat the story in isolation, and thereby ignore the kinds of rhetorical and thematic connections I have outlined.

These ‘etic’ sociopolitical and psychological readings may contain valuable insights and may be transformative for readers who engage with them. However, they lie beyond the horizon of Mark and his implied audience. These interpretations attempt to demystify the demonic and to allegorise it: demons are symbols for something else—either the burdens of Roman oppression or the hidden depths of the individual psyche. This kind of symbolisation bypasses the crucial eschatological dimension that is so strongly embedded in the text. It misses the kind of interpretation expected of Mark’s original readers by reducing his vision of cosmic conflict to the status of ‘mere myth’ that becomes subject to interpretations flowing out of newer worldviews.<sup>34</sup>

However, for readers who see the demonic in terms of psychological and/or social pathology, the story of the demoniac may still be transformative, although the text’s application may have to be expounded in detail because it does not lie ‘on the surface’. Michael Willett Newheart, for example, uses the story as an allegory of his own ‘inner depths’, interpreting it as he would a dream: the Gerasene depicts his repressed ‘shadow side’, but release comes with an awareness of his repressions and projections.<sup>35</sup> This approach witnesses to the power of the story, despite Newheart’s rejection of its historicity. Newheart exploits the text to illustrate a modern Jungian psychological model in a way that would be obscure both to ancient readers and to modern readers who are not initiated into such a mode of analysis. Similarly, the story may be used to symbolise rather appropriately a profound and radical liberation

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<sup>34</sup> Berger’s treatment of the subject [Berger, *Identity*, 44–59] appropriately recognises that ‘what the NT describes as “demonic” can no longer justifiably be translated into the language of psychopathology’; a theological approach is required (56).

<sup>35</sup> Michael Willett Newheart, *“My Name Is Legion”: The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).



from pathological social relationships, à la Girard and Wink,<sup>36</sup> although Mark's first-century readers would not have received it this way.

Although reception and appropriation of the Gospel may be more difficult for today's readers because of the vast shifts in worldview brought about by the Enlightenment, modernism and postmodernism, it presents challenges that are just as real as those given to its original readers. Mark's anthropology is intelligible today in terms of the dialectic between distortion and restoration. The Gerasene demoniac encountered the physical, pre-Easter Jesus face-to-face. Mark, who narrates the transformation, proclaims that this Jesus is the risen Easter Christ who is alive forever. He challenges readers to believe the story and to receive the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the liberator of humanity, and then, in response, to meet him by faith, experience liberation for themselves, and become disciples.

### Summary of the argument

I began by suggesting that Mark's Gospel is an appropriate source of early Christian theological anthropology, and that, because a strong element of Mark's purpose is the transformation of the reader, his text can appropriately be treated as an example of 'transformative discourse'.

In Chapter 2 I took a broad view of the rhetorical techniques evident in the Gospel, and showed that Mark's rhetoric includes proclamation, demonstration and instruction, employing techniques of metaphor, indirection and performance. These elements interweave to produce a composite transformative discourse that potentially impacts the audience in a variety of ways.

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<sup>36</sup> Girard, "Demons"; Wink, *Unmasking*, 43–50. A similar kind of reading is offered by Peter Horsfield, "The Gerasene Demoniac and the Sexually Violated," *St. Mark's Review* 152 (1993): 2–7. The story possesses a 'contemporary, existential truth' (3); victims of sexual violence, 'so severely bound both personally and socially, can still, like the demoniac in Gerasa, persist in breaking those chains and seeking out someone who has the courage not to run away' (6).

My exegesis of Mark 5:1-20 (Chapter 3) revealed many rhetorical and thematic aspects of the Gerasene demoniac story that are relevant to Mark's anthropology. When considered as part of the whole Gospel (Chapter 4), the story in 5:1-20 was found to contribute significantly to many aspects of the Gospel's transformative discourse. I concluded that the demoniac typifies most closely the dynamics of the Gospel's theological anthropology, and can be regarded as somewhat paradigmatic of human transformation in the context of Christian discipleship.

My construction of Mark's theological anthropology (Chapter 5) then revealed a vision of humanity that is strongly predicated on Jesus' eschatological perspective. The Gospel presents *anthrōpos* as a created being, but also as fundamentally distorted. Jesus, however, assumes the possibility of radical personal transformation that has communal ramifications. This possibility energises the rhetorical thrust of the Gospel. Its 'model reader' (the person who responds wholeheartedly as the author intends) is on the way to becoming the eschatological *anthrōpos* who inhabits the kingdom of God.

My work fills a gap in Markan studies by (a) highlighting the contours of the transformative potential of the Gospel, (b) specifying elements of the rhetorical means by which transformation of the reader is promoted, and (c) showing how the rhetoric is linked with a dynamic eschatological anthropology. I have not compared this anthropology to that of the other Gospel writers; this task is perhaps a potential area for further study. However, Mark's anthropological vision is comprehensible and sufficient for appropriation independently of the more developed vision of Paul. I believe I have demonstrated that Mark's narrative is a rich field for the exploration of elements that inform a Christian theological account of human personhood and the quality of human relations.



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