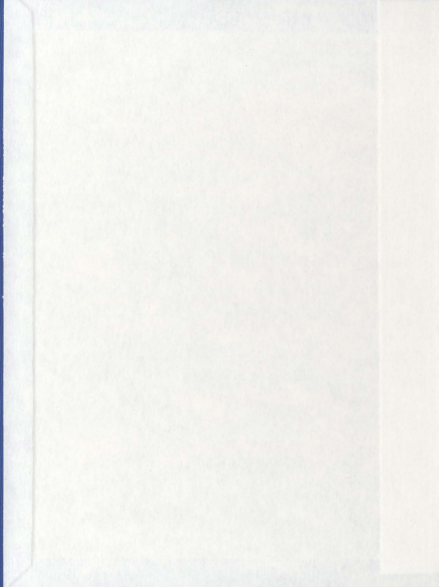


"MY NAME IS LEGION":  
AN EXPLORATION OF THE MEANING OF THE  
STORY OF THE GERASENE DEMONIAK IN  
MARK 5:1-20

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**"My Name is Legion": An Exploration of the Meaning of the Story of the Gerasene  
Demoniac in Mark 5:1-20**

by

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## Abstract

The story of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1-20 is one of the great stories of the bible. Yet the full implications of this story remain largely unexplored. Scholars have focused mostly on it as a single pericope with interesting historical features. Its function within the whole of the Markan redaction has, surprisingly, been neglected. This thesis seeks to redress this neglect by showing how the story of the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac acts as a hermeneutical key which helps us access the fuller dimensions of Mark's narrative.

The form critical approach to Mark's Gospel treated it as a mere collection of traditions. Rudolf Bultmann, for example, claimed that Mark was someone who was not sufficiently in control of his material to be able to impose his own theological view upon it. In more recent scholarship, however, the Gospel of Mark is seen as a complex and sophisticated narrative with a very definite theological point of view. This thesis argues that this point of view is seen quite clearly when we examine how the story of the Gerasene demoniac functions within the whole narrative.

Exorcisms are crucial in understanding the significance of Jesus' mission. By performing exorcisms Jesus is challenging the ruling authorities and summoning the marginalized and oppressed to embrace the Kingdom of God. The story of the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac is central in illustrating this crucial aspect of Jesus' mission. Moreover, by closely analyzing the structure of Mark we can see how in the Markan

redaction whole narrative complexes are woven together -- especially those concerning exorcisms and feeding miracles -- in order to throw into sharper relief the radical nature of what Jesus says and does.

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*The Text of Mark 5:1-20*

Mark 5:1-20 reads:

Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γεργεσηνῶν. καὶ ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθὺς ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν μηνμεῖων ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτη, ὃς τὴν κατοίκησιν εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀλύσει οὐκέτι οὐδεὶς ἐδόνато αὐτὸν ὀφθαλμοῖς, διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν πολλάκις πέδας καὶ ἀλύσειν δεδέσθαι, καὶ διεσπᾶσθαι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τὰς ἀλύσεις καὶ τὰς πέδας συντετριῖσθαι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἴσχυεν αὐτὸν δαμάσαι· καὶ διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἦν κράζων καὶ κατακόπτον ἑαυτὸν λίθοις, καὶ ἰδὼν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔδραμεν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, καὶ κράζας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγει· Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ, υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; ὀκνῶ σε τὸν Θεόν, μὴ με βασανίσῃς. ἔλεγεν γὰρ αὐτῷ· Ἐξέλθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. καὶ ἐπηρώτα αὐτόν· Τί ὀνομά σοι; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη λέγει αὐτῷ, Λεγεὼν ὀνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἔσμεν. καὶ παρακάλεα αὐτόν πολλὰ ἵνα μὴ αὐτῷ ἀποστελεῖν ἔξω τῆς χώρας. Ἦν δὲ ἐκεῖ πρὸς τῇ ὄρει ἀγέλη χοίρων μεγάλη βοσκομένη καὶ παρακάλεσαν αὐτόν λέγοντες· Πέμψον ἡμᾶς εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, ἵνα εἰς αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν. καὶ ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐξελθόντα τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα εἰσῆλθον εἰς τοὺς χοίρους· καὶ ὥρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρηματοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν· ὥς διαχύλαιοι καὶ ἐπένγοντο ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ. καὶ οἱ βόσκοντες αὐτοὺς ἔφυγον καὶ ἀπήγγελλον εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγρούς· καὶ ἦλθον ἰδεῖν τί ἔστιν τὸ γεγονός. καὶ ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν, καὶ θεωροῦσιν τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον καθήμενον καὶ ἡμαρτημένον καὶ

σκηρνονοῦντα, τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγεῶνα, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν. καὶ διηγήσαντο αὐτοῖς οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐγένετο τῷ δαιμονιζομένῳ καὶ περὶ τῶν χοίρων. καὶ ᾤρξαντο παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πλοῖον παρεκάλει αὐτὸν ὁ δαιμονισθεὶς ἵνα μετ' αὐτοῦ ᾗ, καὶ οὐκ ἄφηκεν αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ λέγει αὐτῷ· Ὑπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σοὺς καὶ ἀπάγγελλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ Κύριος σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἡλέησέ σε. καὶ ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ᾤρξατο κηρώσσειν ἐν τῇ Δεκαπόλει ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ πάντες ἐθαύμαζον.

*They came over to the other side of the sea, into the district of the Gerasenes. And when he had come out of the boat, immediately he was met by a man from the tombs, possessed by an unclean spirit. He dwelt among the tombs. No one was able to bind him any longer even with a chain, because he had often been bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been broken by him and the fetters smashed, and no one could subdue him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and among the tombs, crying out, and cutting himself with stones. Seeing Jesus from afar, he ran and prostrated himself before him. Shouting in a loud voice he said, "What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he kept on saying to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" And he asked him, "What is your name?" And he says to him, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And he strongly implored him not to send them out of the country. Now there near the mountain a great herd of pigs was*



*feeding, and they implored him, saying, "Send us into the pigs, let us go into them." And he allowed them. The unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd ran violently down a precipice into the sea, about two thousand of them, and they were choked in the sea. And they that fed the pigs fled and reported in the city and throughout the countryside. And people went out to see what had happened. And they come to Jesus and see the demoniac, sitting, clothed and in his right mind. And those who had seen what had happened told about the demoniac and the pigs. And they begged him to leave their territory. And as he embarked into the boat the man who had had the demon implored him that he might go with him. And he did not permit him, and says to him, "Go home to your own people and report to them what the Lord has done for you, how he had pity on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him, and everyone was astonished.*

**The Greek Translation is from *The Greek New Testament Fourth Revised Edition*, edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce M. Metzger, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: United Bible Societies, 1993).**

**The English translation is my own modified version of that of Alfred Marshall, found in Samuel Bagster, *Greek-English New Testament* (London: Bagster and Sons, 1964). I have tried in the translation to give some indication of Mark's unique and vivid style.**

### *1. Introduction: Method and Markan Scholarship*

#### **Introduction**

The rise of the historical consciousness in the modern world has had extremely significant ramifications for the study of the Bible. As critical ways of thinking became established towards the end of the seventeenth century the Bible came increasingly under scrutiny as a source of revealed truth. On the one hand there was the view that the Bible was a divine and holy book which must be read in a spirit of receptive devotion. On the other hand there was the argument that the Bible must be read critically. It was, after all, only one of many sacred books. The Qur'an and the Hindu scriptures, for example, could not simply be disregarded and the Bible declared to be the only source of truth. The Bible must, it was argued, be treated with a critical eye and in the same way we treat other sacred books. When we do so, it was further argued, it becomes clear that the Bible is a human historical document. It came into being in space and time and was written by humans with all their finite limitations. Moreover, the books of the Bible were declared "holy scripture" by the Church – that is, it was a decision made by humans in an historical context. Thus the historical method came to dominate biblical studies. Beginning in the late seventeenth century and stretching all the way into the present, the dominant paradigm for the study of the Bible, and hence for the New Testament, has been the historical critical one.

The first major enterprise undertaken by historical criticism of the Bible was to try

to uncover the sources behind its books. As the Bible was a book written by humans in history the question became: What are the influences upon the writer and how did they influence the writing of the documents? A sub-question of this general question became: Did the writer(s) use sources? What were they? How did they influence what the author wrote?

The basic idea behind *source criticism* of the New Testament was to uncover the sources which had been used by the Evangelists. This was not intended to be a destructive process. Rather the intent was to show how *reliable* the Gospels were by showing that the Gospel writers utilized trustworthy sources. For example, Gottlieb Wilke wrote an article in 1826 in which he argued that Mark was used as a source by Matthew.<sup>1</sup> Wilke's thesis has been used by scholars to show that not only was Mark written first but that his Gospel was objective, although slightly unrefined, history. Therefore, when Matthew (and also Luke) used Mark they were using a reliable historical source. It soon became apparent, however, that these written sources had an oral history before they were written down. This gave rise to *form criticism*, the inquiry into how the oral tradition came into being and what changes it underwent during the course of its transmission.

One of the most famous form critics was Rudolf Bultmann. He and other form critics focused upon questions surrounding how traditions functioned within the early Christian community. They were not interested in the individual Gospel writers as such,

<sup>1</sup> Gottlieb Wilke, "Über die Parabel von den Arbeitern in Weinsberge, Matthe. 20, 1-16" ZWT 1 (1826), as referenced by David J. Hawkin, *The Johannine World: Reflections on the Theology of the Fourth Gospel and Contemporary Society* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 38.

but rather saw them as *Sammler*, or collectors, of tradition. In commenting on Mark, Bultmann states unequivocally that he was not "sufficiently master of his material to venture a systematic construction himself."<sup>2</sup> Mark was simply a 'recorder' of the oral traditions in circulation at the time.

It was in response to this de-emphasizing of the creative role of the Gospel authors that *redaction criticism*<sup>3</sup> sprang up. Redaction critics said that we should take into account not only the transmission of tradition within the community but also the editing (redacting) of the individual Gospel writer. When we do this we see that each Evangelist had his own particular point of view. The primary aim of redaction criticism is the uncovering of this point of view by an examination of the structure of the Gospel and its author's handling of the early Church traditions included in it.

Within redaction criticism there are two approaches. One studies the redaction by focusing on its origins, the other by examining its overall design. The difference between the different approaches reflects different emphases. The first highlights the distinctive character of the redaction – what sets it apart from its predecessors. The second looks at the redactor's total theology, including, as well as differences, features shared with the position of his predecessor. The phrase "composition criticism,"<sup>4</sup> coined by E. Haenchen,

<sup>2</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), as quoted by Hawkin, *The Johannine World: Reflections on the Theology of the Fourth Gospel and Contemporary Society*, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> The English translation of *Redaktionsgeschichte*, a phrase coined by German scholar Willi Marxsen.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu. Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der Kanonischen Parallelen* (Berlin: Tüpelmann, 1966).

is used to describe the latter approach. Composition criticism is "a holistic variation of redaction criticism in which the work itself . . . viewed rigorously and persistently in its entirety, becomes the primary context for interpreting any part of it."<sup>5</sup> It is very close to literary criticism. Of course, there are differences from literary criticism in that the purpose is historical: to find the authors theology and in the process learn more about the theological history of Christianity. Redaction criticism helps us move from the theological position of the Evangelist to the historical situation which gave rise to that theological position. One strand of redaction criticism does this by focusing on how the total design of the narrative illuminates the point of view of the Evangelist. As Robert Fowler says:

As a piece of literature, the Gospel has an integrity, a certain wholeness to it which should be acknowledged by those who interpret it. It is a fatal error to move from the standard axiom that the Gospel tradition originally circulated as individual sayings and stories to the conclusion that the Gospels are simply collected pieces with no great coherence. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. The Gospels do in fact display unity and coherence, but that can be seen if one entertains the possibility of a holistic approach to them and avoids an overly fragmented pericope-by-pericope reading of the texts. Only by approaching the Gospels as literary works, i.e., as integral wholes, can we see how all the individual pieces fit together to make a whole.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospel: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 40-41.

The approach taken in this thesis is to follow the lead of Fowler and others and to treat Mark as a whole, coherent narrative written by someone who knew what he was doing. The reader must accordingly treat Mark's work as a complete narrative with a structure and plot. The story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), it will be argued, is an important part of the structure and plot. Moreover, there are political and social elements in the story that provide insight into the setting of the narrative, the time in which Jesus lived and provide information about the period in which the author and his audience lived. Yet further, insights into the meaning of the story may be gained by understanding the psychological dynamics within it. I hope to show that applying psychological and political reading strategies to Mark 5:1-20 is very illuminating and helps us to see more clearly the many-faceted nature of the narrative. Not only do I hope to demonstrate that the story of Legion is quite integral to the structure and story-line of Mark but I will also show that there are features of the narrative which have not been fully appreciated, such as the fact that Mark's description of the psychological state of the "demoniac" is more a social and political comment than a statement about his mental health.

## Recent Approaches to the Study of Mark

### (a) *Psychology and Biblical Studies*

W. H. Auden once said of Sigmund Freud, "He is no more a person now but a whole climate of opinion."<sup>7</sup> In this comment Auden captures perfectly the significance of Freud. Freud has changed our thinking to such an extent that today it is difficult to imagine what the world of thought was like before him. Freud was born into a world of lunatic asylums and "bedlams" where those who behaved violently or strangely were locked away, often in the most horrible and inhumane conditions. There was no understanding of why they behaved so aberrantly. The main consideration was to keep them away from the public by locking them up and sometimes restraining them with shackles. It was Freud's great accomplishment that he changed the way we deal with such people. After Freud, people who behaved in a neurotic and irrational way were treated *as people* who could be cured. They were not seen as possessed by demons or suffering from strange incurable physical maladies. They were treated as mentally ill people who could be cured by a thorough-going understanding of how the mind worked.

Freud's theories about the unconscious mind are well known today. Indeed, as Auden intimated, they have become part of our mental furniture. We have accepted that the roots of mental illness lie in the mind itself. The very phrase "mental illness" demonstrates how much our way of thinking has changed since pre-Freudian days. We

<sup>7</sup> From W.H. Auden's poem "In Memory of Sigmund Freud" in *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 104.

accept that there is a category "mental illness," and that mentally ill people require understanding and their condition requires thorough analysis. Thus, despite the success of Hollywood movies such as *The Exorcist*, in our post-Freudian world the notion that psychosis is due to demon possession is no longer an accepted assumption. Psychoses spring from within the mind itself. They are not the result of outside, demonic forces. So the stories of demon possession in the New Testament pose a problem. If there really is no such thing as demon possession, does this mean that we have to disregard what the New Testament says on this matter? Jesus clearly speaks of demon possession and casts out demons and encourages his followers to do the same. The Synoptic Gospels<sup>8</sup> speak of a Jesus who appears to believe that the power of demons over humans was the cause of illness.

One can respond to this problem in various ways. One can say that Jesus was a man of his time. It is natural that, like his contemporaries, he should believe in demon possession. The more religiously conservative may, however, claim that Jesus actually knew better than to believe in demons but had to "play along" with the beliefs of the time. As the great New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd put it: "He could not have spoken so effectively to the times if he had not spoken in its terms."<sup>9</sup>

On this second understanding of the matter Jesus knew that demons do not exist. His healing of the demon possessed would not therefore be simple miracles of casting out

<sup>8</sup> The Gospel of John does not have any exorcisms.

<sup>9</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd, 1955), p. 237.



demons. They would rather demonstrate the healing power of a Jesus who knew better than to think that the cause of the strange behaviour of so-called demoniacs was because they were possessed by a demon. Rather, Jesus knew that the problem lay in the mind itself. In this view, Jesus is the Great Psychologist, able to analyze the problem and cure the "patient" by non-physical means.

A fascinating example of this approach is found in the work of Leslie D. Weatherhead. Weatherhead was a Methodist clergyman and one of the pioneers of pastoral psychology. He wrote more than thirty books and in his most famous one, *Psychology, Religion and Healing*,<sup>10</sup> he discusses the healing of the Gerasene demoniac.

The story of the Gerasene demoniac, says Weatherhead, shows how Jesus "altered his treatment to suit the *patient*" and "took great pains to *understand the case*" (emphases added).<sup>11</sup> From the outset of his discussion it is obvious that Weatherhead sees Jesus as the Great Psychologist who "spent the greater part of the night [with the Gerasene demoniac] in the most careful diagnosis and treatment".<sup>12</sup> During this time Jesus carefully probes and searches for the cause of the demoniac's strange behaviour: "For Jesus kept on saying to him, 'Come out of him, unclean spirit!'" (Mk 5:8). But this first attempt at healing the man does not work. The man does not respond to what Weatherhead calls "suggestion". The psychosis is too deeply embedded. So Jesus switches tack. He asks the man for his name. To ask for someone's name is to seek power over them, says

<sup>10</sup> Leslie D. Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1951).

<sup>11</sup> Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing*, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing*, p. 53.

Weatherhead. In the famous story in Genesis 32 where the man (sometimes referred to as "an angel") wrestles with Jacob, he is asked for his name by the man. Jacob gives it. But when Jacob asks for the name of the man he is given no response. The man, having power over Jacob, can demand his name. But Jacob, having no power over the man, cannot demand his name. Similarly, Jesus is asking for the name of the power which dominates the man and in doing so is himself trying to gain power over it. The man replies, "My name is Legion". The man's response is the key to understanding the illness. Weatherhead explains:

During the First World War a man was found in no-man's land, wandering about between our trenches and those of the enemy, and the only word he could say was "Arras." This was the town in which he had been tortured to make him impart information, and the torture had driven him mad. Similarly, I remember the case of a man in a mental hospital during the First World War who had been tortured by the Germans, and the only word he would utter was the word "Boche". Here, in St. Mark's story, we have a man muttering the word "Legion," and it is not fanciful to suppose that he had suffered some shock at the hands of the Roman legion. We know from the story of the massacre of the innocents the kind of thing the Roman Legion could do, and, indeed, it is possible that this patient witnessed this dreadful affair. If he had seen tiny children slaughtered, and had rushed in from the sunny street terrified of the approaching soldiers whose swords were dripping red with blood, and had cried, "Mummy, Mummy, legion!" (if we may modernise his

language), then it would be no flight of imagination to suppose that the childhood's shock – especially if the patient had a hereditary emotional unbalance – it would be quite sufficient to drive him into psychosis. And now the community had exiled the patient right out of the security of their own fellowship into a wild graveyard in a foreign land, where he is left to live amongst the pigs, terrified by spasms of fear which leap up from his repressed memories into consciousness, and express themselves in maniacal frenzies and in loud cries.<sup>17</sup>

By revealing his name the man thus reveals why he is acting so abnormally. The recognition of the origins of his psychosis leads to a great catharsis, accompanied by shrieks and cries, frightening a herd of pigs nearby which then stampede into the sea. The man is cured, and is found the next morning "clothed and in his right mind" by those who had been tending to the pigs.

Weatherhead's interpretation is not only a wonderful example of rationalism at work, but it also illustrates the idea that we should simply think of the demon possessed as mentally ill and Jesus as the great healer. The emphasis is on historicizing the interaction between Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac. There is no discussion of, or recognition of, the function of the Gerasene demoniac story within the wider narrative. Such an interpretation is essentially reductionistic, failing to recognize the complexities and subtleties of narrative structure and design. It reduces the story to a simple tale about Jesus curing a mentally ill man. But the narrative is about more than mental illness, and

<sup>17</sup> Weatherhead, *Psychology: Religion and Healing*, p. 56-57.

certainly about more than the root causes of the Gerasene demoniac's behaviour.

More recently scholars interested in psychology and the bible have offered more sophisticated interpretations than that of Weatherhead. Scholars such as Wayne Rollins have emphasized that psychology has much to contribute to the way we understand the whole narrative, and especially the interaction between reader and text. In the so-called hermeneutical circle of reader and text, the reader brings certain assumptions to the text.<sup>14</sup> The assumptions are then brought into question by the reading of the text, and are revised accordingly. With each reading we therefore learn more about ourselves and the world of the text. The relationship between reader and text is therefore a dynamic one, where understanding is ever becoming more differentiated. Rollins emphasizes that psychology helps us to understand the nature of this differentiation. When we study a text there are, as it were, two levels to our understanding of the text. The first is what he calls the text's "psychic constitution," that is, the latent content of a text which is, as such, consciously inaccessible to the author and his or her community. The second he calls the text's "psychic function." By this he means the effect on the psyche of the reader. We thus have to understand what we are looking for. In order to evaluate the latent content of a text it must first be contextualized. This does involve an examination of historical questions, and Rollins recognizes this. But, nevertheless, Rollins does seem to be more interested in the "psychic function" of the text and sees its primary function to be a mirror which reflects the workings of the psyche.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne G. Rollins, *Soul and Psyche: The Bible in Psychological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

This certainly is the view of Diarmuid McGann. McGann's study of the Gospel of Mark in *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark through a Jungian Perspective*<sup>15</sup> utilizes a psychological approach as he applies aspects of the theories developed by Carl Jung to the Gospel of Mark. According to McGann, the Gospel is "essential to knowing who we are as a people"<sup>16</sup> and as individuals. The "layers" of the self are a central aspect of the thought of Carl Jung. Jung saw that there were three interacting layers in the psychological make up of a human being. First, there is the conscious self, that which we are aware of, while the unconscious is that of which we are not aware and can be divided into two aspects which results in three layers. In simplified terms, the unconscious is made up of the personal that refers to our personal repressed history, and the collective, which refers to the history of humanity that has left a mark on individuals on a psychological as well as physical level. Jung acknowledges that a person is made of the known and unknown that must come together in the search for wholeness. This tension between opposites and the need for wholeness is at the center of Jung's psychological theories. According to McGann, there is a similar tension at work in the Gospel of Mark.

McGann's interpretation of the story of the Gerasene demoniac draws explicitly on Jung's psychoanalytical theory. McGann connects Jung's theory of the *persona* to the demoniac. The theory states that people develop a facade, called a *persona*, that acts as a mask that protects people and influences how people present themselves to the wider

<sup>15</sup> Diarmuid McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective*, p. 9.

world that is socially acceptable.<sup>17</sup> With the development of the *persona* comes the *shadow*, which is the underside of the *persona*. As the *persona* is more strongly identified, the shadow becomes stronger as most of the elements of our personality are found in the shadow. The shadow is unconscious, beneath the surface, and people are not aware of its existence. The shadow is composed of feelings, impulses and tendencies that are deemed unacceptable when they arise. These emotions and impulses are not always negative; some positive attributes can be pushed aside to the shadow. The shadow allows people to judge, hate, and condemn while maintaining a sense of righteousness. According to Jung's theory the larger the shadow the greater the sense of righteousness. The shadow can also be projected outward and encountered.

In the story of the Gerasene demoniac Jesus goes into an unknown area to reach out to the Gentiles. The area and the demoniac are described in dark terms, living among the tombs and unable to be controlled. The description holds a possibility of anger and danger.<sup>18</sup> The pigs that are present nearby are seen as a desirable place for the demons to go. The pigs can also be seen as representation of the collective unconscious that is part of Jung's theory.<sup>19</sup> The demon represents the shadow which when projected outward unto the pigs is dangerous and destructive, as the pigs run off a cliff after receiving the Legion.<sup>20</sup> McGann finishes his analysis of the story of the Gerasene demoniac by applying the

<sup>17</sup> McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective*, p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective*, p. 76.

<sup>20</sup> McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective*, p. 77.

psychological aspects of the story to the lives of modern readers.

Rollins is to be commended for recognizing that psychological studies must be located in a broader spectrum of inquiry. The psychological insights into the story of the Gerasene demoniac by Weatherhead and McGann, however, have to be seen as ultimately unsatisfactory. Weatherhead's interpretation is too rationalistic and takes too little account of the dynamics of the whole of the Markan narrative. McGann's theory is ideally suited to the "New Age" but, as such, is too individualistic. It fails to see the social and political aspects of the narrative. Others, however, have stressed the importance of political and social scientific studies in illuminating our understanding of the Markan story, and in particular, Mark's story of the Gerasene demoniac. It is to some of those studies that we now turn.

*(b) Politics and Religion*

Political approaches to Mark's text have provided insights into the political situation in Palestine in the first century as a part of the Roman Empire. Such approaches allow the reader to gain insights into the political situation at the time of Jesus and his ministry, the situation at the time Mark was written, and the situation of the audience.

Richard Horsley writes on the politics of Mark's Gospel in *Hearing the Whole Story: Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*. Horsley uses sociological methods to show that Mark is a story of how Jesus challenged the dominant social order of his day. Horsley approaches the Gospel as a complete story and not as a collection of stories and incidents.

He claims that to read the Gospel as a series of separate incidents reduces the impact of the narrative and even blocks access to the story.<sup>21</sup> Horsley suggests reading the Gospel in a similar manner as short novels which have considerable conflict and drama. We still, of course, have to acknowledge that the text has changed over time and may have originated as an oral story that would have been recited by a performer. To fully appreciate the Gospel it has to be understood as the product of what Horsley refers to as interpretive communities. An interpretive community has its own distinctive point of view, reading conventions and stakes.<sup>22</sup> These communities are usually the groups which make the text available, whether they are religious groups or scholarly groups, and these groups can hold extensive influence over how a text is understood by society.

While Horsley approaches the Gospel as a narrative, he does not rely on literary or narrative criticism. Literary criticism focuses on character development in the text, while Horsley contends that the characters in the text do not develop, but just serve a purpose to move along the plot. Literary criticism also applies modern assumptions to the text. Horsley does not seek to apply universal philosophical concepts to Mark. Narrative criticism takes Mark as primarily a religious text.<sup>23</sup> For Horsley, the text is a story about Jesus as a healer and political leader and even the opponents of Jesus are portrayed in political terms. Mark, as a narrative, is symbolic of social communication that represents

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 7.



and interprets the experience, worldview and social-political-religious agenda of a particular people.<sup>24</sup> To fully understand the complete story of Mark's Gospel, its politics must be understood and its plotting, characterization and setting are part of its rhetoric.

Historical context is also important to understanding the entire story of Mark. The text cannot be interpreted in isolation from its historical situation. It is important to understand the history behind the text to fully appreciate it or the text will be viewed in a distorted way. The historical situation of the text is necessary for understanding the situations the text was responding to, the situation that produced the text, as the events narrated in the text as well as innuendos, nuances and implications made in the text.<sup>25</sup>

Horsley states that biblical texts cannot be considered solely religious texts as they are political as well. The texts should be recognized as literature about a people subjected by the Roman Empire. In a modern postcolonial world, says Horsley, it should be possible to understand Mark's text as a story about a counter colonial movement among peasants in Galilee and surrounding area. Rereading the text should enable us to discern whether the text actually addressed subjected people and gave voice to their concerns.<sup>26</sup> The text should give information about the life of the ancient Galileans as the subjects of an Empire.

There are several aspects that are given in the story which show that it is about a

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<sup>24</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 30.

village based social movement. Jesus teaches to larger groups or communities instead of individuals. Jesus performs his healings, exorcisms and teachings in the presence of large gathered assemblies, such as his first exorcism at the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1: 21-28). Jesus spread his movement among many communities and Jesus personally travels to different villages in the area of Galilee and the surrounding Gentile areas. He sends the twelve disciples on missions to teach and perform healings in his name to villages throughout the area. According to Horsley, this indicates a broad program of outreach and movement.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus never enters a city in Galilee. There are two major cities in the area and Jesus appears to avoid them. Sepphoris is a few miles from Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, and Tiberias is near Capernaum. The cities were relatively new, having being built by Herod Antipas and would have been viewed with resentment as the cities represented the presence of the Romans in the area. Even when Jesus moves beyond Galilee into the surrounding Gentile areas, he avoids major cities, only stopping at the villages that surround the cities.<sup>28</sup>

Mark presents Jesus as leading a popular movement that had religious aspects in the teachings, healings and exorcisms he performed. Mark also reveals that the religious elements in Jesus' activities are a deliberate form of opposition to the rulers and ruling institutions.<sup>29</sup> Jesus' opposition to the dominant system is made clear by Mark when Jesus

<sup>27</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 41.

arrives in Jerusalem. He drives the sellers and moneychangers out of the temple (Mark 11:15-18), shares the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-12) and predicts the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:1-8). These actions were considered revolutionary by the authorities, as the Temple was the central religious and political institution of the area.<sup>30</sup> Mark gives these actions as the reason Jesus was condemned by the priests at his trial.

Mark also presents Jesus as an authority figure who is unlike others. In the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus is shown to have authority and power that the people have not seen before. Jesus was a manifestation of a Kingdom that was completely different from the established one.<sup>31</sup> This is also a threat to the authorities as the people respond to Jesus, such as when he performs his first exorcism and the people are amazed by it (Mark 1:21-28). The authorities capture Jesus and he is executed, but the movement continues following his death. Jesus died as a martyr for the movement,<sup>32</sup> which according to the ending of the story, continues among the villages of Galilee led by Jesus' followers, under the direction of a risen Jesus.

According to Horsley, Mark is best understood if modern readers identify with the historical audience in context, or at least become knowledgeable about the historical communities in which the story was performed, as well as the people whom the story is about. This will allow the modern reader to empathize with the historical audience. An

<sup>30</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 42.

understanding of the context of the historical audience allows the modern reader to begin to share the common meaning and nuances of words, cultural conventions, historical experiences, and historical world views that are drastically different from the modern world.<sup>33</sup>

Modern assumptions often unconsciously determine how we read a text. The Western notion of individualism, for example, influences the reading of the text, usually leading to a persistent interpretation of Mark being a story about discipleship. This interpretation obscures the oppressive political and economic situation as well as the broader political struggle of Jesus and his followers.<sup>34</sup> For Horsley this focus on discipleship is not in keeping with the dominant conflict in the story. The main conflict is focused on Jesus and his movement of renewal of the people of Israel, not the disciples. The main opposition is between village peasant and the Roman rulers, who were oppressors of the people.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 78.

*(c) Social Science and the Understanding of Mark*

Paul Hollenbach uses methods from the social sciences in his study of exorcism and demon possession in Mark's Gospel. A social scientific approach sees exorcisms and demon possession as a common worldwide phenomena that has occurred throughout history.<sup>36</sup> This historical view of exorcisms allows a different understanding to develop in which the role of exorcisms in Jesus' ministry is the focus of study. By studying exorcisms in this way, we come to an understanding of the way exorcisms fit into Jesus' career.

There are some studies from the social sciences which may be used to study Mark's story about Jesus. Descriptive theories allow for a more comprehensive picture of what life in first century Palestine was like. Theoretical studies provide information regarding the social structures and social dynamics of the time.<sup>37</sup> In social scientific studies of Mark exorcisms figure prominently. Especially in Mark exorcisms are an integral part of the narrative and it is these very exorcisms which draw the negative attention and hostility of the authorities. Descriptive and theoretical social scientific studies illuminate why this is so.

From the social sciences come five categories that are relevant to the understanding of demon possession and exorcisms that can be used to understand exorcisms in the bible and Palestine in the first century. The categories include criteria for

<sup>36</sup> Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and the Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Approach" in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (Vol 49, No. 4, 1981), p. 567.

<sup>37</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 568.

identifying demoniacs, causes of demoniac possession, living conditions of demoniacs, the treatment of demoniacs, and the consequences of their healing.<sup>38</sup> The criteria that are used to identify a person as a demoniac are social constructions that appear in different cultures in varied forms. In first century Palestine, the criteria included a radically divided self; there is an awareness of the demons as a separate entity yet part of the person being possessed.<sup>39</sup> This division could vary in severity as in the case of the Gerasene demoniac who is described as being possessed by a Legion of demons. Strange behaviour is another way of identifying a demoniac. The possessed person can participate in destructive behaviour or mild antisocial behaviour that could be seen as evidence of demon possession. The symptoms were caused by the presence of a demon, but the reasons why a demon would possess a particular individual do not seem to be a concern in ancient society. In first century Judaism the cause of demon possession was perceived to be sin, which seems to be similar to other cultures.<sup>40</sup> The living conditions of demoniacs varied depending on their situation. Many demoniacs lived and were cared for by family members. Demoniacs who were not violent had freedom to go to public places. Violent demoniacs were usually restrained in some way while those who were impossible to control were often ostracized and lived alone in deserts or cemeteries and were uncared for by society.<sup>41</sup> There was a large need for cures for demon possession and there were many healers that offered their services by establishing themselves in one community or

<sup>38</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 570.

<sup>39</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 570.

<sup>40</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 571.

<sup>41</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 571.

travelling through an area. There were many different types of healers with exorcists being one kind. There was much competition between exorcists, usually based on class distinctions and jealousy.<sup>42</sup> When demoniacs were cured, it resulted in strong reactions from the community. Reactions included amazement and fear among the spectators, and often the desire to follow the healer on the part of the healed person. The negative reactions included hostility toward the healer and even rejection of the healer, which can be seen in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' exorcisms.<sup>43</sup>

Demon possession could be caused or made worse by social tensions. Class antagonism caused by economic exploitation, conflicts between traditions, and colonial domination and revolution are commonly accepted social tensions that contributed to demon possession.<sup>44</sup> Where these conditions exist there appears to be an increase in the number of cases of mental illness or demon possession. There existed in Palestine an opposition between the elite social groups, such as the Sadducees and Pharisees, and the oppressed groups such as zealots and the peasant class.<sup>45</sup> The pressure of the social tension could lead to an increase in demon possessions.

Demon possession can also be seen as a form of social protest or escape from the

<sup>42</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 571.

<sup>43</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 571.

<sup>44</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 573. Hollenbach illustrates this point by looking to Franz Fanon's study of Algeria, which experienced similar conditions under oppressive colonialism as Palestine did in the first century. In the case of Algeria, mental illness was manifested as protest against the dehumanizing aspects of imperialism. According to Fanon, mental illness functioned not only as reactions to specific events and circumstances, but also functioned as a pathology in the atmosphere of total war. Hollenbach, p. 575, from Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Ballantine, 1963).

<sup>45</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 575.

social situation that people were living in. In Palestine in the first century, the oppression the masses experienced as subjects of the Roman Empire would have resulted in cases of demon possession that served as a form of protest and escape.<sup>46</sup> Demon possession becomes a symptom of stress caused by social conditions. It also serves a way of dealing with the stress in an economical way that avoids social catastrophe. This means of protest can be seen in various cultures and social situations. Possession may have acted as a sort of 'fix' for people who had no other way of coping with the social and political conditions that they could not control.<sup>47</sup> The Gerasene demoniac can be seen as an example of this form of protest in the Palestinian context, as his story contains many allusions to Roman oppression and its effects on the community.

An accusation of mental illness or demon possession was also a form of social control used by the dominant classes. Such accusations allowed the dominant class to exercise control over the dominated masses.<sup>48</sup> The dominant classes also controlled the definition of what was considered mental illness and what was perceived as healing. Accusations could be made against anyone who challenged the *status quo* and threatened the position of those in the elite groups. Such accusations of illness, demon possession and witchcraft increased in times of social unrest and instability. This negative classification works in a similar way as using possession as a form of protest. The weaker

<sup>46</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 575.

<sup>47</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 576. Hollenbach compares the situation in Palestine in the first century with Erika Bourguignon's description of the situation in Haiti. See Erika Bourguignon, *Possession* (San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp, 1976).

<sup>48</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 577.



members of society seek salvation by possession and the stronger groups seek salvation by their ostracism of weaker groups. Both groups use demon possession to protest the other.<sup>49</sup> This dynamic has been noticed in all categories of societies around the world and throughout history. Therefore it is possible that this dynamic would occur in Palestine in the first century and influence how the authorities reacted to Jesus' exorcisms. Mark tells us that Jesus himself was accused of being possessed by a demon (Mark 3:22-30), when he is seen as overstepping the bounds of his role as an exorcist. The accusation could have been an attempt on the part of the authorities to assert their control.

Modern social sciences can lead to the development of an understanding of society in first century Palestine, which can contribute to a fuller understanding of Jesus' ministry in the area, particularly his role as an exorcist. Demon possession was a form of social accommodation for the conditions of the time. Such accommodation was common in the Hellenist period, during which political and economic domination and exploitation as well as threatened traditional culture and beliefs were common. Demon symbolism allowed the oppressed to express their anger towards the social system and the authorities to maintain their social positions and subdue those who protested against the oppressors.<sup>50</sup>

In *The Scapegoat*, René Girard applies his theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism to the bible. Mimetic desire, which is played out through imitation, is the underlying cause behind most forms of conflict. Persecutions are at the root of

<sup>49</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 577.

<sup>50</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 580.

Girard's interpretation of biblical texts. To understand persecution texts, Girard encourages readers to approach the text with mistrust. Stereotypes are common in persecution texts. Readers must be aware of these stereotypes and be able to recognize and describe them.

Girard outlines several stereotypes of persecution that appear in texts. He is mostly concerned with persecution that occurs at times of crisis, when normal social institutions that prevent large-scale persecution have been weakened or replaced by a system that persecutes members of the society.<sup>31</sup> As cultures become less differentiated in times of crisis weaker subcultures are often eclipsed. This can cause people to feel powerless when presented with an eclipse of their culture in the light of a crisis. This results in the breakdown of relationships which leads to a pattern of placing blame on others or society as a whole. Another group can be seen as being behind the crisis and is then accused of serious crimes that attack the foundation of the culture and families. These crimes can include violent, sexual and religious crimes.<sup>32</sup> A small group is usually the target of the accusations and is seen as being responsible for the crisis that is the background for the persecutions.

The victims of such accusations and blame are generally randomly selected. There are times when a group of victims is selected because they belong to a class that is susceptible to persecution and crimes committed are less important. Groups that were

<sup>31</sup> René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 15.

frequently targeted are minorities that tend to polarize the majority such as ethnic and religious groups. Minorities are generally poorly integrated into or distinct from the mainstream society.<sup>33</sup> Physical reasons contribute to the selection of victims of persecution along with the cultural and religious. Such conditions as illness, mental problems, genetic deformities, and disabilities can become a reason for persecution.<sup>34</sup> Even if victims are selected for social, cultural or religious reasons the persecutors may even attribute illness or disability on the group to ensure that society is polarized against the selected victims. The selection of the victims does not result in their difference in the social system but their difference outside the system. The difference outside the system is terrifying for those within the system as the shortcomings, fragility and mortality of the system can be revealed.<sup>35</sup>

Victims come to serve as scapegoats, having responsibility for social problems placed on them. The biblical texts contain many examples of scapegoats. Scapegoating has an unconscious nature, so that persecutors are generally unaware that their actions have resulted in the creation of a scapegoat. All differences that may be noticed among a group are polarized onto a victim in a crisis of mimetic conflict.<sup>36</sup> While unconscious tendencies are not explicitly mentioned in the biblical texts, there are allusions to it. Jesus on the cross prays to God to forgive the people because they don't know what they are

<sup>33</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> David Scott Arnold, "Hidden Since the Foundation of the World: Girard, Turner and Two Mythic Readings," in *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, edited by Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 142.

doing (Luke 23: 34).<sup>57</sup> According to Girard's interpretation of this part of the text, the people should be forgiven for sacrificing Jesus as a scapegoat because they don't know what they are doing.

Horsley, Hollenbach, and Girard have all expanded our horizons by showing us the many different ways we can approach the study of Mark and, in particular, the study of the Gerasene demoniac. It is now time to examine the text of Mark to see how some of their insights may be applied.

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<sup>57</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 110.

## *2. The Gerasene Demoniac*

### **Exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark**

Exorcisms play an important role in the Gospel of Mark and are important in understanding the full dimensions of Mark's story of Jesus. Mark contains several accounts of Jesus performing exorcisms and, significantly, Jesus' first miracle in Mark was an exorcism, in which Jesus drives an unclean spirit out of a man in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath (Mark 1: 21-28). This event not only marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, it also shows that Jesus was a different kind of teacher. According to Mark, Jesus was a teacher with authority unlike the other teachers of the time. Jesus' authority was such that even spirits listened to him. Jesus also performed miracles outside the region of Galilee, going to the surrounding Gentile areas. The exorcism of the Legion in the Gerasene region is the primary example of this activity in Gentile areas. The exorcism stories show, among other things, that healing was an important part of Jesus' ministry and that his work and teachings were available to both Jews and Gentiles.

Exorcism stories in the Gospel of Mark serve to show, on a manifest level, that Jesus was a compassionate teacher and healer. But there are also latent political and religious motifs in these stories as well. The religious motifs serve to show that Jesus was the Messiah and fulfilled prophecies that appear in the Jewish religious texts. The political elements reveal what the social situation of Jesus' time was like as well as the situation of Mark's audience. Exorcisms, moreover, have a political function in the

narratives of Mark for they reveal much about the role of demoniacs in the society of the time of Jesus.

To fully understand how exorcists and exorcisms were viewed in Palestine in the first century, it is necessary to understand what was considered to be an exorcism. Graham Twelftree provides a definition in his historical study of Jesus' activities as an exorcist:

Exorcism was a form of healing used when demons or evil spirits were thought to have entered a person and to be responsible for sickness and was the attempt to control and cast out or expel evil spiritual beings or demons from people.<sup>18</sup>

This definition attempts to limit exorcisms to how they may have been understood during the first century in Palestine, and by the Gospel author. The understanding of exorcisms, at the time of Jesus would have been known by the writers of the Gospel as it has been established by form critics that the Gospels are rooted in oral and written traditions that were available to them.<sup>19</sup> The traditional Palestinian understanding may, however, have been modified and amplified by the Gospel writers for their own specific purposes.

The first miracle account in Mark, the exorcism in the synagogue, sets the tone of Mark's story of Jesus' ministry in which Jesus is an authoritative, yet compassionate

<sup>18</sup> Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p.13.

<sup>19</sup> Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus*, p. 55.

teacher. The event occurs on the Sabbath in the synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus is not a teacher like the Jewish scribes (Mark 1:22), because Jesus possesses an authority which is unavailable to the scribes that also amazes the people who are present to witness the exorcism. This sets the stage for conflict with the Jewish authorities that continues throughout the Gospel. Mark links Jesus' activities as an exorcist to his activities as a teacher, who had new teachings and a different form of authority that contributed to his fame.<sup>60</sup>

The authority that Jesus possesses, as shown in the exorcisms, makes Jesus a unique figure. He is also presented in the Gospels as fulfilling prophecy. Many of the healings and exorcisms presented in the Gospels are to show that Jesus' ability to do such things were the subject of Old Testament prophecies.<sup>61</sup> This connection to prophecy illuminates further the significance of the person of Jesus. The connection to prophecy also allowed Mark to use exorcisms and healings as a key to Jesus' religious mission, which was to initiate the Kingdom of God and forgive sins.<sup>62</sup> Although the exorcisms were demonstrations of the authority Jesus possessed for his mission, viewing these activities as purely demonstrative acts is to miss the "original context and target of Jesus' healings which had radical potential, social and political dynamics that were missed in their day."<sup>63</sup> The radical nature of Jesus' actions can be seen in the people he helped, who

<sup>60</sup> Tweelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus*, p. 59.

<sup>61</sup> Keith Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> M. Percy, "Christ the Healer: Modern Healing Movements and the Imperative for the Poor," *SJFC* 1.2 (1995) 122, quoted in Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 4.

were mostly social outcasts. In the Gospel of Mark, Gentiles were also included in this group as in the case of the Gerasene demoniac and the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30).

The exorcisms and healings performed by Jesus thus serve several purposes. These events were important aspects of Jesus' ministry, initiating as they did the Kingdom of God. Mark presents the exorcism accounts as signs that Jesus was to establish God's earthly reign. The exorcisms and healings bring restoration that holds a promise of the coming Kingdom. In Mark, exorcisms show that the Kingdom is available to all people, therefore Jesus is shown to move around the area of Galilee and into the Gentile regions rather than staying in one place, performing exorcisms and healing the sick.<sup>64</sup> Since Jesus' mission was focussed on the initiation of the Kingdom, the healings and exorcisms function as forms of authentication of his mission and person, as well as acting as signs of better things to come and providing hope in the place of fear.<sup>65</sup>

Another function of the exorcisms that Jesus performed was to provide opportunities to the people who witnessed these events to consider what Jesus was doing and ultimately accept or reject him. These activities of Jesus provided a catalyst for faith or rejection.<sup>66</sup> Those who witnessed such events were in a position to recognize Jesus as a healer, exorcist and teacher unlike any they had known before. Exorcisms and healings provided other opportunities as well, such as teaching opportunities. Jesus used these

<sup>64</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 12-13.

<sup>66</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 13.



events to teach his followers about discipleship. The lessons usually had to do with faith and obedience. Jesus heals in response to the faith of the sick. The writers of the Gospels tried to pass those lessons on to their readers.<sup>67</sup> In Mark, the healings and exorcisms that commend faith and impart a lesson about the importance of faith are shown side by side with examples where little faith is shown, even to the point where Jesus is rejected by the people who know him well. The rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth is an example of a lack of faith. In Mark this incident is followed by the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, where the people of the community send Jesus away out of fear of what he had done.<sup>68</sup> The other lesson that is transmitted through the accounts of Jesus' exorcisms and healings is that people are encouraged to learn from and obey those who had been healed.<sup>69</sup> This is clear in the healing and exorcism accounts in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. This, however, is missing in Mark as Jesus tells those he heals to be quiet and to not speak of what he has done.

While exorcisms are an important part of Jesus' mission, the term 'exorcism,' ἐξορκιστή; in Greek, is rarely used. In Mark the terms most commonly used are ἐξέρχουμι and ἐκβάλλω<sup>70</sup> ("cast out"). The use of these terms suggests a removal and relocation of the demon. Other terms frequently used in exorcism texts are "binding" and "releasing" which suggest physical contact with the demonic spirit and would become

<sup>67</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 28.

<sup>70</sup> Eric Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 2002), p. 133.

key to the understanding and symbolism of demon possession and exorcisms in Christianity.<sup>71</sup> Since Mark frequently places exorcisms and healings in the same episodes, being able to recognize the language of exorcisms is important in order to distinguish the two types of activities.

In Mark's Gospel, exorcisms are not described in great detail. Mark does not tell the reader how Jesus performed exorcisms and the mechanics of the exorcism are unimportant. Mark is more concerned with the fact that Jesus performed exorcisms as a means of conveying his authority to the people to whom he ministered. While healings were described as involving some form of physical contact, exorcisms involved some form of command or rebuke of the demons by Jesus.<sup>72</sup> Although there is no description of what Jesus does or consistency of what Jesus says in the exorcisms he performs, the Gospel includes a mandate for the apostles that follow to act in accordance with the examples of Jesus, and do the same.

Mark also attempts to place Jesus' activities as an exorcist in the context of fulfilling the teachings of the prophets. When Jesus is confronted by the Jewish authorities who accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul, Jesus defends himself with a series of illustrations including the parable of the binding of the strong man which is based on a passage from Isaiah 49: 24-25:

Would someone take spoils from a giant? And if someone should unjustly

<sup>71</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 133.

<sup>72</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 136.

take a 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.

This passage is modified when placed into the context of possession and exorcisms as Mark has done. The image of binding is connected to the usual treatment of demoniacs who are bound and restrained. The act of exorcism becomes an act of unbinding. Mark uses such stories to represent the earthly possession of individuals as well as elevating them to represent the struggle between good and evil.<sup>73</sup> While the scribes accuse Jesus of being under the control of Beelzebul, Jesus' response seems to suggest that Jesus' power and ability to perform exorcisms indicates a hostile relationship towards the demonic powers. Jesus is not possessed with an evil spirit; instead Mark wants to show that Jesus' authority to exorcise was the result of a spiritual presence instead of external sources.<sup>74</sup> The criticism from the scribes may have been a common criticism in Jesus' time that Mark appears to reject. For Mark, the fact that Jesus can successfully perform exorcisms is proof of his legitimate authority to do so. Mark's view appears in his account of the unknown exorcist who is performing exorcisms in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38-40). For Mark, the success of the exorcist will contribute to an appreciation of Jesus and his cause.<sup>75</sup> This episode also alludes to the practice of calling on Jesus' name that became an important

<sup>73</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 141.

<sup>74</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 142.

<sup>75</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 142.

part of the ministry of the disciples and was an important element of exorcisms in the early church.<sup>76</sup>

Exorcisms are an important part of the message of the Kingdom of God that is central to Jesus' ministry. Jesus sees his exorcisms as proof of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' exorcisms were seen as being more impressive and successful than other exorcists. This combined with his message about God's rule would have led to criticism as seen in Mark.<sup>77</sup> The accusations in Mark 3 that Jesus was doing the work of Beelzebul can be seen as a veiled acknowledgement of the success and impressive nature of Jesus' exorcisms. According to Mark "the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons'" (Mark 3:22). As we have already noted, this accusation was meant to discredit Jesus and his success by claiming that he was doing the work of a demon.<sup>78</sup> The exorcisms that Jesus performs are signs of the Kingdom of God and the struggle between good and evil which marks the final eschatological conflict that is to come and is in its early stages. His success in performing exorcisms and other healings can be seen as proof of his authority to announce the coming Kingdom and its victory over Satan and the demons.<sup>79</sup> The presence of demons in the human sphere through the possession of people is seen as a form of active opposition

<sup>76</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 143.

<sup>77</sup> Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Exorcisms and Proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the light of the Testaments" in *Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2006), p. 213.

<sup>78</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Exorcisms and Proclamation in the Kingdom of God in the Light of the Testaments," p. 213. Evans also points to a parallel incident that is recorded in the *Testament of Solomon*. The language of the incident in Solomon is not identical to the language in Mark, but may reflect a common demonological terminology shared by different traditions.

<sup>79</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Exorcisms and Proclamation in the Kingdom in the Light of the Testaments," p. 220.

towards God by Satan. The act of exorcism by Jesus is a sign that the Kingdom of God is also entering the human realm.<sup>80</sup> Jesus is able to defeat Satan by acting on behalf of God and using that authority to perform healings and exorcisms.

Exorcisms in the Gospels have been interpreted in light of the relationship between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Jesus is shown as constantly coming into conflict with the authorities in connection with his activities as a healer and exorcist. The Pharisees notice Jesus' activities as an exorcist that is indicated by the accusation in Mark 3, in which they accuse Jesus of witchcraft and being a demoniac. The Pharisees were also hostile towards Jesus because of the importance he placed on exorcisms. Jesus interpreted exorcisms differently than the Pharisees; therefore they saw Jesus as a deviant.<sup>81</sup> Jesus' interpretation attached a great deal of importance to his exorcist activities because he considered the exorcisms he performed to be an act of God in the world, and he encouraged his followers to do the same, sending them on missions to perform exorcisms. Jesus' interpretation marked a significant shift in the values the Pharisees held. The Pharisees were conservative and focused on doing God's will in everyday life. Jesus' focus on exorcism as a major action did not fit into their views. As a result the Pharisees viewed Jesus' exorcisms as a counter-cultural action that was a threat to them.<sup>82</sup>

Jesus is also shown in the Gospels as coming into conflict with Herod Antipas,

<sup>80</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Exorcisms and Proclamation in the Kingdom in the Light of the Testaments," p. 230.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Hollenbach, "Help for Interpreting Jesus' Exorcisms" in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (No. 32, 1993), p. 125.

<sup>82</sup> Hollenbach, "Help for Interpreting Jesus' Exorcisms," p. 125.

ruler of the Galilee region. Herod wanted Jesus killed as a result of his exorcising activity and his apparent growing influence in the political sphere as Jesus sent his followers throughout the area to perform exorcisms and healings. According to Mark, this activity of Jesus was seen as a threat to Herod's position and security (Mark: 6:14-16).<sup>83</sup> The responses of the Pharisees and Herod Antipas indicate the deeper social and political dimensions of exorcism. Demoniacs filled a niche in first century society and exorcists were allowed to heal them, but Jesus acted as an unauthorized exorcist who considered exorcisms to be very important and the work of God, challenged the social system and highlighted some of the tensions which existed in society. This challenge to the social system is what attracted the attention of the authorities to Jesus' activities.<sup>84</sup>

For Mark, the exorcisms of Jesus showed that he was proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God and that his knowledge and power came from God. The exorcisms allowed Jesus to exercise his power over 'unclean spirits' as well as show the authorities, who claimed to have the necessary spiritual insights to understand the works of God, that he had the greater power to deliver people from the oppression of sin and evil.<sup>85</sup> While it appears that demon possession and the presence of 'unclean spirits' was a prominent concern in the contemporary society of Jesus and the authors of the synoptic Gospels, there is actually very little consideration given to these issues in the biblical texts. The only attention demon possession receives in the texts is in relation to how it fits into the

<sup>83</sup> Hollenbach, "Help for Interpreting Jesus' Exorcisms," p. 125.

<sup>84</sup> Hollenbach, "Help for Interpreting Jesus' Exorcisms," p. 126.

<sup>85</sup> J. Keir Howard, "New Testament Exorcism and its Significance Today" in *The Expository Times* (No. 96, 1985), p. 105.

ministry and activities of Jesus. There is no information given about what the life of the demoniacs was like as they dealt with their possession, what their life was like before becoming possessed by a demon or even what may have been considered the cause of the demonic possession. Demon possession is only given significance by Mark in its relation to Jesus' ministry and how it contributed to the theological significance of Jesus' work.<sup>86</sup> Exorcisms are very important in Mark because they show that Jesus was demonstrating the actions of God in the world and that the forces of evil which hold sway over humanity were retreating from the coming of the Kingdom of God.<sup>87</sup>

### **The Gerasene Demoniac in the Gospel of Mark**

The understanding of demon possession in the traditions of Judaism clearly influenced the biblical authors. This understanding created a dualism between realms of power. This dualism is based on a cosmology of two opposing powers, which was common in Judaism, although the Gospel writers refer to the opposing powers in terms of the Kingdom of God and the rule of Satan, it was combined with the internal aspects of possession which was common in Near Eastern thought.<sup>88</sup> This combination of ideas that developed in the New Testament and led to the notion of indwelling possession becoming the dominant point of view when it came to demons and possession. Indwelling possession has a profound effect on human beings, as it is this type of possession that

<sup>86</sup> Howard, "New Testament Exorcism and its Significance Today," p. 108.

<sup>87</sup> Howard, "New Testament Exorcism and its Significance Today," p. 108.

<sup>88</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 119.

directly related humanity with demonic and divine spiritual forces and causes adverse effects on the human body and makes exorcisms a necessary occurrence.<sup>89</sup> Mark maintains the views of the wider culture when describing Jesus' activities as an exorcist. Mark assumes a hierarchy of demons including higher and lower demons. In Mark, for example, there is a controversy with Jesus and the scribes who claim that Jesus is being influenced by the demon Beelzebul, and this allows him to perform exorcisms (Mark 3:20-27). Most of the other demons mentioned in the Gospels are lower demons, although only one is actually named besides Beelzebul and that is Legion in the story of the Gerasene demoniac.<sup>90</sup>

The way exorcism stories are told in the New Testament with a focus on the demon and exorcist involved and less on the person affected by demon possession and benefiting from the exorcism is done to highlight the work of the exorcist and to show the readers where the authority of the exorcist comes from. In Mark the exorcist is Jesus who is shown to have received his authority from God, making him a divine healer who can reveal this power through his exorcisms. As a result the accounts of exorcisms usually end in the same way. Jesus leaves and those who witness the exorcism are left in amazement or fear.<sup>91</sup> The victim is only discussed to inform the reader of the severity of the possession. The causes of demonic possession are never described in the New Testament. When a victim is encountered, they are already in a state of possession,

<sup>89</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 119.

<sup>90</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 121.

<sup>91</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 125.



although they are usually characterized as being victims of aggressive demons, who are rebelling against the divine order.<sup>92</sup> There is no explanation as to why a particular person was likely to become the victim of demon possession, although there were things that were believed to be causes during this period that included personal failings, ill health and misfortune.<sup>93</sup>

There is very little said about the demoniacs in the New Testament, but they are generally portrayed as innocent victims whose main purpose is to allow the exorcist to exercise their power publicly. Possession is mostly associated with human physiology that does not have ethical causes or consequences. Although there are cases in the New Testament where demon possession is linked to ethical behaviour,<sup>94</sup> in such cases the demoniacs are believed to be responsible for their possession. As a disease takes on a demonic persona the emotions of a the victim can be demonized as a form of moral judgement. The victim is considered guilty of associations with evil and possession is the punishment.<sup>95</sup>

Here the work of René Girard is significant in further elaborating upon this insight. He sees the story of the Gerasene demoniac through the eyes of mimetic theory. According to Girard, mimeticism is the source of people's troubles, desires and rivalries and creates disorder and chaos. Reconciliation is possible and the dynamics of

<sup>92</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 126.

<sup>93</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 126.

<sup>94</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 153.

<sup>95</sup> Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity*, p. 154.

reconciliation are the basis of mythological and religious beginnings.<sup>96</sup> These dynamics are present in the stories in the Gospels. Satan is presented as the incarnation of mimetic desire. Demons and demonic forces are seen as inferior forms of Satan. Demons appear as psychological manifestations and are usually seen as the cause of predominant disorder.<sup>97</sup> Jesus encounters demons frequently throughout the Gospels, and they usually beg Jesus to leave them alone. Jesus is such a threat that Satan appears to Jesus in the wilderness to divert him from his mission.<sup>98</sup>

Girard focuses on Mark's version of Jesus' encounter in Gerasa, although he does refer to Matthew and Luke's versions of the story. Mark's account is longer and contains more details than the other accounts. According to Girard, the description of the demoniac as existing between the living and the dead, living among the tombs, points to the mimetic crisis that leads to a loss of differentiation and persecution.<sup>99</sup> The mimetic phenomena that can be seen in the Gerasene demoniac are not permanent. According to Girard, the Gerasene community and demoniac have a cyclical pattern in dealing with each other. In Girard's reading of this account in Luke's Gospel the demoniac is only out of the city during bad periods.<sup>100</sup> There has been no definitive break between the demoniac and his community. The man would be restrained in chains and he would break free, and this appeared to occur multiple times. For Girard the binding were attempts to

<sup>96</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 165.

<sup>97</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 166.

<sup>98</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 167.

<sup>99</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 168.

<sup>100</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 168.

cure the man by removing his symptoms, which would be wandering around the mountains and tombs. The illness is so severe that violence is necessary to bind him, which results in increasing the man's desire to seek solitude outside the city.<sup>101</sup> The continual binding becomes ritualistic. The people come to rely on the drama that becomes connected to the ritual and suffering. When Jesus heals the man, the drama is over. The people ask Jesus to leave the area for this reason. He has cured the man without any violence, whereas the people had tried to simply restrain him with violence and chains. They experience being deprived of the drama and suffering as a loss.<sup>102</sup>

Girard notes that some of the behaviour described in the account of the Gerasene demoniac can be considered mimetic. The demoniac is concerned with stoning. He is described as hitting and cutting himself with stones. His practice of self-punishment mirrors the punishment of criminals in the Middle East.<sup>103</sup> The violence the Gerasenes subject the demoniac to is also a form of mimetic behaviour. The violence creates a cycle of violence; the people are violent toward the possessed man, yet they want to keep him near. The possessed man flees the violence of the community and then is violent towards himself. The cycle links the Gerasenes and the demoniac in a relationship of mimetic rivalry.<sup>104</sup>

Girard also considers the connotations of the name "Legion." While the military

<sup>101</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 169.

<sup>102</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 169.

<sup>103</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 170.

<sup>104</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 171.

imagery connected to the term is quite clear, the term can refer to crowds in general. Jesus is surrounded by crowds during his ministry. There are crowds surrounding Jesus in Galilee before he crosses to the Gentile territory and after he returns. In the region of the Gerasenes, Jesus encounters the crowd of demons, the Legion, as well as the swine and the crowd from the community after the healing.<sup>105</sup> There is a difference between the Galilean crowds and the Gentile crowds. The Galileans are not afraid of the miracles Jesus performs; they look to Jesus as a saviour, although they will turn against him. The Gentiles are afraid because of the miracle that Jesus has performed among them. The miracle creates anxiety; therefore they ask Jesus to leave the area.<sup>106</sup> They are disturbed by the removal of their demons. They have become, as it were, attached to the demons and cannot be without them. The cycle that had been established is very important to their existence; it provides structure and acts as a form of catharsis.<sup>107</sup> The healing of the possessed man and the drowning of the Legion in the pigs has *completely altered the system*. The mimeticism in the system that has been created in the Gerasenes community is what unites the people as a community. The community is organized around the coexistence of the people and demons.<sup>108</sup>

Richard Horsley in his book, *Hearing the Whole Word*, takes a slightly different tack from Girard. Horsley's interpretation is not as Freudian as that of Girard and the Jesus of his study is narrower. Horsley seeks to draw out the political implications of the

<sup>105</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 173.

<sup>106</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 174.

<sup>107</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 175.

<sup>108</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 182.

Legion narrative. Horsley sees the story as being symbolic of the political struggles between the people of the Palestinian region and the Romans. For Horsley, the political dimensions of Jesus' struggle are central to understanding the exorcism in the region of the Gerasenes. The name "Legion" would have been recognized by the audience as being a reference to the Roman troops. The audience knew the Roman legions that would have come into the villages, burned their houses and killed and enslaved the people. This adds the political element to the story and has the demon becoming the Roman army.<sup>109</sup> The possessed man is suffering as a result of the presence of the Roman army in the area. The man's violent behaviour is a reaction to the violence experienced at the hands of the Romans. The man becomes symbolic of the whole society that suffers under Roman rule. There is a sense of political empowerment in hearing through the text that the Legion was subject to the authority of Jesus and that Jesus dismissed the Legion and removes it from the region. In light of the military and political allusions in the text, the story can be seen as a liberation story. The people become liberated from the Roman legions. Jesus is taking control and destroying the forces that possess the people, in doing this he is establishing God's rule.<sup>110</sup>

According to Horsley, the exorcisms in Mark's Gospel have increased importance when viewed in the light of a political background. The imperial conflict that was the reality of the area of Galilee was tied up in a higher, supernatural conflict between God and Satan. Belief in demons was an important tool for oppressed people living under

<sup>109</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 140.

<sup>110</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 141.

foreign rule. People in ancient Palestine living under the authority of the Romans, understood the situation as a struggle between God and demonic forces. This understanding was both an enabling revelation and a diversion. Belief that their situation was part of something bigger and under God's control allowed the people to survive the oppressive presence of the Romans without resorting to rebellion.<sup>111</sup> The violence and economic exploitation that accompanied Roman rule was generally attributed to demon possession. Jesus works to bring about the renewal of the people and this, says Horsley, is what Mark's narrative is primarily about. The healing of the Gerasene demoniac names the Roman political and military forces as the true force from which the people seek liberation. The audience of Mark's Gospel is now aware of this and the story continues with a focus on the Roman rulers of Israel and their representatives that lead to Jesus' trial and crucifixion.<sup>112</sup>

For Horsley, the exorcisms contain a message about the political situation surrounding the struggle of the people against the Roman rulers. The final political confrontation occurs with Jesus' execution. The report of the crucifixion in Mark contains much of the same language used to describe the exorcisms. The first half of Mark's story focuses on the struggle of the people against demoniac forces. The focus shifts in the second half of the Gospel and becomes explicitly political and focused on human institutions and rulers. The story of the Gerasene demoniac is directed towards people who are the subjects of imperial rule and includes a message of renewal for the people,

<sup>111</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 145.

<sup>112</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 147.

and this includes opposing the local and foreign rulers.<sup>113</sup>

The Gerasene Demoniac may, therefore, be understood from both a psychological and religious perspective and also from a political one. A psychological understanding of the demoniac views demon possession as a representation of mental illness and social control. Paul Hollenbach relies on the social sciences to gain an understanding of the psychological aspects of the story. Hollenbach uses the methods of the social sciences to interpret the story of the Gerasene demoniac and what it reveals about demon possession. The story shows how demon possession can act as both a disease and cure. The demons are identified with the Roman legions that are occupying Palestine. The legions are the most visible sign of the Romans presence in the area and the demoniac equates it with the devil. Yet the only way the man is able to do that is through mental disorder. The mental symptoms seem to be the result of the hatred the man feels toward the Romans and the necessity to repress that anger for his own safety. If he expresses that anger, he faces punishment from the Romans, but the madness he is now experiencing allows the man to express his anger and escape the punishment of the authorities.<sup>114</sup> In this case the demon possession is a result of the oppression and an expression of resistance. Demon possession is a symbolic resistance to Roman oppression.

The community has accepted the man suffering the demon possession within certain limits. The people have to deal with the violence that is a part of his illness. They

<sup>113</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*, p. 148.

<sup>114</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 581.

have gone so far as to try to bind and restrain the man and that did not work. The people have ostracised the man to the nearby cemetery. The man staying at the cemetery created a *status quo* that worked for the people. They did not have to deal with the man on a daily basis, yet he was still nearby and able to be monitored. The established order was destroyed when Jesus came and healed the man. This is what led the townspeople to ask Jesus to leave the area. The people are afraid of what Jesus has done. Hollenbach suggests that the healing of the man and the loss of the swine have brought the people's hatred of the Roman occupation out into the open, leaving the people vulnerable.<sup>115</sup> This vulnerability is felt more profoundly since the healed man is telling his story throughout the area.

The story of the Gerasene demoniac reveals information about society and social norms in first century Palestine. The way the demoniac was treated and accommodated suggests that there was a prescribed and socially acceptable way of handling demoniacs. The demoniacs as well as the exorcists who healed them had a place in society, just as the religious leaders. If the demoniacs and exorcists acted within the prescribed boundaries of their roles, there were no conflicts with the authorities. As soon as the limits were overstepped, conflict with the authorities would occur as a means of reinstituting the acceptable social order.<sup>116</sup> Jesus appears to be working in this pattern. He performs exorcisms that lead to conflict with the Pharisees and Herod Antipas. Jesus' exorcisms seem to overstep the limits of the role of exorcist. Hollenbach suggests two reasons why

<sup>115</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 581.

<sup>116</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 582.



Jesus' exorcisms were considered to be socially unacceptable; the first was that Jesus may have interpreted and practised exorcisms in a way that was different from the Pharisees' own interpretation. The Pharisees would have considered this difference deviant and they would want to stop him. Secondly, Jesus saw his exorcisms as being the work of God in the world, thus making exorcisms very important. The Pharisees reacted against this. To place such significance on exorcisms and demon possession was to open themselves up to the possibility that *illness and the social system were connected*. This was not possible for the Pharisees who had become an important part of the social hierarchy.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, Jesus' activities appeared to be radical, counter-cultural and a threat to the social position of the Pharisees.

Jesus' conflict with Herod Antipas was also related to his exorcisms. The hostility that Herod developed toward Jesus could have come from the Pharisees who were concerned about Jesus' activities, as well as concerned over the growing movement surrounding Jesus in the missions of the twelve disciples. A growing social movement, such as the one following Jesus, would have been perceived as a threat to Herod.<sup>118</sup> Jesus' exorcisms were problematic since he was acting as an unauthorized exorcist who claimed his work was the work of God and was leading a large social movement. Jesus' exorcisms were a contributing factor that leads to his crucifixion. At the heart of the conflict between Jesus and the authorities were differences in social values. The authorities wanted to

<sup>117</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 583.

<sup>118</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 583. Herod would have seen the Jesus movement in a similar light as the movement surrounding John the Baptist which was a threat to Herod's position and security.

maintain social stability while Jesus valued social healing.<sup>119</sup>

### **The Dimensions of Mark's Story**

The story of the Gerasene demoniac allows the author of Mark to show that Jesus' actions were symbolic of a new order that would be ushered into the world. Jesus is a harbinger of a new order which breaks down social and political barriers. It is a story which is multifaceted and multidimensional. The incident of the Gerasene demoniac illustrates this perhaps more than any other story.

The military symbolism that can be found in the account of the Gerasene demoniac cannot be taken literally to mean that Jesus was advocating opposing the Roman military by force. Mark uses political language to bring attention to and make space for Jesus' message about the Kingdom.<sup>120</sup> Eventually the way will be cleared of those things that stand in the way of the Kingdom.

The episode involving the Gerasene demoniac is unique as it is one of the few times Jesus interacts with and even performs miracles for Gentiles. The story shows Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory, in this particular case the Decapolis. The Decapolis translated as 'ten cities', which was a Hellenistic region in the eastern area of the Roman Empire.<sup>121</sup> The location that Mark describes and refers to as the "country of

<sup>119</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 584.

<sup>120</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 194.

<sup>121</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 190.

the Gerasenes" (Mark 5:1) is problematic. The city of Gerasa was approximately 30 miles from the area that Mark describes.<sup>122</sup> Although Mark may have been trying to exaggerate the point that Jesus was outside his home territory and in a Gentile area.

The story begins when Jesus arrives on shore and is immediately confronted by the demoniac, or a man with an unclean spirit (Mark 5:2). The demoniac has been living in the wilderness, among the tombs. This makes the man unclean, according to Jewish law. Yet Jesus interacts with him. The interaction of a Jewish person with someone who was unclean, as demoniacs were considered to be, or even the area of the tombs that was unclean, was prohibited by Jewish law. Mark notes further along in the story that the presence of pigs also contribute to the impure nature of the location. The impurity of the location can be connected to a passage from Isaiah that outlines things that are offensive to God. In Isaiah 65:3-4 tombs and swine are both noted as being displeasing to God:

A people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels (NRSV).

This impure character of the setting is key to suggesting a Gentile location. The demoniac had been living among the tombs outside of the community. There had also been several attempts made to restrain the demoniac. The demoniac had been restrained with chains

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<sup>122</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 190.

and shackles and he always managed to break free. The demoniac was quite strong and no one had enough strength to subdue him. The demoniac lives a troubled life in the cemetery, howling and harming himself with stones (Mark 5: 4-5).

The demoniac sees Jesus approaching and demands to know what Jesus wants with him. Here Jesus is referred to as the "υιὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου" (Mark 5:7), which is a Hellenistic term that appears in other places in the New Testament.<sup>123</sup> The use of this greeting also highlights the Gentile setting of the story. Jesus engages in a conversation with the demoniac. The demons are trying to name Jesus, but Jesus wants to know about the demon. In verse 11, Jesus is told a name; the demon is known as "Λεγίων," for "they are many." The military allusion is quite clear and in Mark's social period would only have referred to a division in the Roman military.<sup>124</sup> Military language and illusions are found throughout the rest of the story. There is a herd of swine in the area, near the meeting place of the demoniac and Jesus. The term 'herd,' ἀγέλη in Greek, is generally not used to refer to swine, but could be a term used to refer to military recruits.<sup>125</sup> The Λεγίων begs to be sent into the swine before Jesus starts the exorcism. Jesus agrees and sends the Λεγίων from the man into the swine who then run into the sea. The death of the swine also removes the Λεγίων from the area. The image of the swine rushing into the sea can be seen as a military image of soldiers rushing onto the battlefield. In the Jewish context the image alludes to liberation of the Israelites in Exodus when the Egyptian army

<sup>123</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 191.

<sup>124</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 191.

<sup>125</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 191.

follows the Israelites into the Red Sea and are drowned (Ex. 15:4). Although this incident occurs in a Gentile area there is meaning for the Jewish background of Mark's audience.<sup>126</sup>

The account of the exorcism concludes with witnesses, the swineherds, running to tell others what they had seen. The townspeople return to the area, see the demoniac healed, become afraid and ask Jesus to leave (Mark 5:14-16). The healed man wants to come with Jesus, but he refuses. Jesus tells the man "Υπάγε· εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σοῦς, καὶ ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἠλέησεν σε" (Mark 5:19). Mark tells us that the man preaches about his experience throughout the Decapolis. This is different from other healings or miracles in which Jesus wants his actions to remain secret.

<sup>126</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 191. Myers also refers to a passage from Josephus regarding an incident in which Galileans drowned Herodian nobles during an uprising (*Ant.*, XIV,xv,10). Josephus also records another incident in which "Vespasian... sent Lucius Annianus to Gerasa with a cavalry and a considerable number of foot soldiers. After taking the town by assault, he killed a thousand of the young men who had not escaped, took their families captive, and allowed his soldiers to plunder the property. Finally, he set fire to the houses and marched against the surrounding villages. Those who were able-bodied fled, the weak perished, and all that was left went up in flames. So did the war spread throughout the mountain and plain country" (*JWar*, IV, ix, 1). These incidents help our understanding of the political background to Mark.

### 3. The Gerasene Demoniac and the Markan Redaction

The Gospel of Mark has a very deliberate structure in which the author of the text organized his source materials to create a narrative with a particular plot that served the purposes of the author. Mark describes Jesus' public ministry in the first nine chapters of the text. One of the elements of this ministry, and an important aspect of the structure of the text, is Jesus' movements throughout the area of Galilee into the Gentile area surrounding it.

#### **Geography and Structure**

The movement into the Gentile territory is introduced by Mark through "sea crossings." Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee numerous times and performs miracles in Gentile territory that parallel the miracles he performs in Galilee. These movements reveal the structure that Mark used to shape his narrative and need to be understood within the social context of the first century period. The inclusion of the Gentiles in the narrative stresses how unique Jesus was as it was a religious taboo for Jews to interact with Gentiles. Jewish thought was concerned with who was within and outside the people of God.<sup>127</sup> Jesus' travels outside Galilee can thus be seen as a means of establishing a new order.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Eric K. Wefald, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms," in *The Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 60 (1995), p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 186.

The Gentile mission is mentioned explicitly by Mark as Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee. Jesus often crosses the sea to the Gentile regions on the other side, even though sea travel was a dangerous undertaking. Jesus appears to travel easily across the sea to the unfamiliar Gentile territories that border the Galilee region. Jesus is shown as being a mediator between the Jews and the Gentiles when he travels to reveal the Gospel to each group.<sup>129</sup> Jesus makes four trips across the Sea of Galilee in Mark. The first trip is referenced in Mark 4:35, Jesus leaves some point in Galilee and arrives in the country of the Gerasenes, then makes a return trip. In Mark 6:45, Jesus makes another trip across the sea to Bethsaida, stopping in the area of Gennesaret. While Jesus has sent the disciples ahead of him, he is also instructing them to move outside the areas and people they know to include Gentiles.<sup>130</sup> Then he returns to Galilee. Another journey occurs on land as Jesus travels to the area of Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24) then he travels to the region of Decapolis. These journeys are set within the structure and plot of the narrative. This goes against the view that Mark was a collection of source material that lacked cohesion.<sup>131</sup>

The sources of Mark take the form of sayings of Jesus and stories about him created by prophets and storytellers within the Jesus movement.<sup>132</sup> There are suggestions that the material, as Mark found it, was arranged in a particular manner. This pre-markan arrangement contributed to the presence of cycles in the narrative. These cycles link

<sup>129</sup> Wefald, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark," p.7.

<sup>130</sup> Wefald, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark," p. 10.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, the comment of Bultmann, above p. 5, footnote 2.

<sup>132</sup> Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2003), p. 304.

material by subject and theme. Healing stories are connected to other healings that occurred in different communities, as well as link Jesus' teachings and miracles to the Gentiles to those that occurred among the Jews. But Mark has organized the material in a way that allows the reader to understand the message of the text: that Jesus was acting on behalf of God to institute the Kingdom of God on earth. Mark, for example, introduces episodes in similar ways. Geographical references usually introduce and conclude an episode. Places are usually given a symbolic significance in Mark, for example, the sea becomes a place of teaching and the wilderness is a place of temptation.<sup>133</sup>

Another of Mark's organizational tools is *intercalation*, or sandwiching.<sup>134</sup> This refers to the appearance of a story within a story such as the account of the woman with the haemorrhage which is inserted in the account of the healing of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:21-43. These sandwiched stories appear throughout the entire Gospel and even the whole text is organized as a large sandwich. The Gospel is divided into three large sections with the first section 1:1-8:26 and the third section 11:1-16:8 providing a frame for the middle section, 8:27-10:45. The middle section is a transition from Jesus' ministry in the area around the Sea of Galilee to his final days and death in Jerusalem. The middle section also contains the three passion predictions as well as Jesus explaining what must happen to his disciples.<sup>135</sup>

The Gospel of Mark is also organized by geography. The story moves along

<sup>133</sup> Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 307.

<sup>134</sup> Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 308.

<sup>135</sup> Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 308.



geographical lines, from one area to another, following Jesus' travelling activities. The beginning of the text occurs in Galilee then moves beyond that region, with the text concluding in Jerusalem. The summary material that appears throughout the text summarizes the teachings and activities.<sup>136</sup> These summaries act as transitions in the narrative and mark a shift from one story or location to a new story and location, such as in Mark 5:21 which marks the movement of Jesus from the area of the Gerasenes back to Galilee.

In light of the stylistic and structural features of the Gospel of Mark, an outline can be constructed focusing on the geographical movements from Galilee to Jerusalem and the themes that appear in the narrative. Duling provides a brief outline of the text which follows the geographical and structural features found in Mark:<sup>137</sup>

1:1-13 Introduction

1:14-15 Transitional summary

*Galilee*

1:16-3:6 Section dealing with the authority of Jesus

3:7-12 Transitional Summary

3:13-6:6a Jesus as the Son of God and rejected by his own people

6:6b Transitional Summary

<sup>136</sup> Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 308.

<sup>137</sup> Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 309.

6:7-8:21 Jesus is misunderstood by his disciples

*Caesarea Philippi*

8:22-26 Transition – blindness miracle

8:27-10:45 blindness of the disciples

10:46-52 Transition – blindness miracle

*Jerusalem*

11:1-12:44 Days leading up to the passion

13:1-5a Introduction to apocalyptic discourse

13:5b-37 Apocalyptic discourse

14:1:12 Introduction to the passion narrative

14:13-16:8 Passion narrative

The division of the text highlights distinct themes in the text. For example the theme of blindness is very clear in the middle transitional section. It begins and ends with a miracle story that involves Jesus healing blindness. The teaching that occurs in this section focuses on the inability of the disciples to see what it is that Jesus is doing. This section includes teaching by Jesus, the passion predictions and the transfiguration. In each of these things the disciples are unable to fully understand what Jesus is doing or telling them. The first major section focuses on the question of who Jesus is, as well as the

secrecy surrounding Jesus' identity. The final section of the text answers the question regarding Jesus' identity by focusing of His last days in Jerusalem.<sup>118</sup>

### The Bread Cycle

The bread cycle deals with the feeding narratives, in which Jesus feeds 5000 people and 4000 people in separate incidents. The appearances in the text of these accounts appear at the end of parallel cycles that occur in chapters 4 through 8:

Cycle 1 (Mark 4:35-6:44)	Cycle 2 (Mark 6:45-8:26)
4:35-41 Stilling the Storm	6:45- 51 Jesus walks on the sea
5:1-20 The Gerasene Demoniac	8:22-26 Blind man of Bethsaida <sup>119</sup>
5:25-34 Woman with a Haemorrhage	7:24b-30 Syrophenician woman
5:21-23, 35-43 Jairus' Daughter	7:32-37 Deaf Mute
6:34-44 Feeding of 5,000	8:1-10 Feeding the 4, 000 <sup>120</sup>

Each cycle begins with a nature miracle, in which Jesus is shown to have command over the elements of nature by calming a severe storm in the first account and then walking on water in the account that introduces the second cycle. These episodes serve the purpose of

<sup>118</sup> David J. Hawkin, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (April-June 1977), p. 110.

<sup>119</sup> The appearance of the account of the the blind man of Bethsaida is out of sequence because Mark is thought to have moved it from its original position to support the theme of the blind disciples found later in the narrative. Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 306.

<sup>120</sup> Outline of cycles taken from Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 305.

showing that Jesus had authority that was unique; he was able to assert his authority over nature. This authority is what characterized Jesus' public ministry and the various miracles and healings he performed. The cycles in the text begin with these events to highlight the authority Jesus uses to perform the healings and miracles that follow.

The stilling of the storm is followed by the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. The storm occurs suddenly as Jesus and the disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory. Sudden storms were not uncommon on the Sea of Galilee.<sup>141</sup> Jesus is asleep and is only awoken by the disciples who are afraid of the storm. Jesus wakes and tells the storm to be still (Mark 4:38-39). The disciples are just as frightened by Jesus' authority over the storm as they are of the storm itself. Shortly after the storm the boat arrives on shore. Jesus encounters the Gerasene demoniac as soon as he arrives in the area. After Jesus has healed the man and removed the Legion from the area, people from the nearby community ask Jesus to leave. In Mark 5:21 an uneventful sea crossing is mentioned as Jesus and the disciples return to the Jewish side of the sea.

After Jesus arrives on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he encounters one of the leaders of the synagogue, Jarius, who asks that Jesus help his dying twelve year old daughter. Jesus agreed and while he is going to the man's daughter he is involved with a crowd of people that includes a woman suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years. She believes that if she touches Jesus' clothes she will be healed. The woman would have

<sup>141</sup> Gerard Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus* (Middlegreen, England: St. Paul Publishing, 1987), p. 74.

been considered ritually unclean and it would have been unusual for someone who is unclean to be in a large crowd as Mark described.<sup>142</sup> The woman seems to want to avoid notice by slipping into the crowd and only touching Jesus' clothes, but Jesus notices. Jesus wants to speak to the woman to finish the healing by telling her that her faith has made her well (Mark 5:34). Then Jesus continues to go to heal Jarius' daughter, although messengers had arrived telling of the girl's death (Mark 5:35). The girl is raised by Jesus and walks around and Jesus tells them not to say anything and to give her something to eat (5:43). This example of Mark's sandwich technique of organization allows Mark to tell of more of Jesus' miracles in a short period of time. In this instance it appears that Jesus performs two miracles as soon as he arrived in the area.

The cycle concludes with the story of the feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6:34-44). This story follows the account of the mission to the twelve and the death of John the Baptist which is not included in the cycle. The feeding occurs in a deserted place. Many people had seen Jesus and the disciples leaving the town and followed them. When Jesus arrived at the place he felt compassion for all the people who had come there to see him so he began to teach. The disciples wanted Jesus to leave and send the people away to go get something to eat. Jesus tells the disciples to feed the people. The disciples collected five loaves of bread and two fish from the crowd. There is a lengthy exchange between Jesus and the disciples, which slows the movement of the narrative and adds anticipation for the reader.<sup>143</sup> Jesus took the food, blessed it and broke up into pieces. The food was

<sup>142</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 65.

<sup>143</sup> John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), p.

shared among 5,000 men (Mark 6:44)<sup>144</sup> and twelve baskets of left over food was collected after everyone had eaten. This feeding narrative is directed towards the Jewish people. It occurs in a Jewish area near the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in a Jewish region. There are allusions to elements of Judaism within Mark's account. The number of fish, five, is significant as it conjures up the number of books in the Torah. The twelve baskets collected after the meal recalls that there are twelve tribes of Israel. The word that appears in the text for basket, *κόφινος*, refers to a basket commonly used by the Jewish people.<sup>145</sup>

The second series of narratives of the bread cycle contains stories similar to those in the first cycle. It begins with a nature miracle on the sea of Galilee. In this story Jesus walks on water, to the amazement of the disciples. After the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus sends his disciples ahead of him to Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). After spending some time alone, Jesus notices the boat and the disciples out on the water. The disciples are struggling to row against the strong wind. Jesus sets out, walking on the water with the intention to pass the disciples. By early morning he is near the disciples who notice him and are afraid since they believed they were seeing a ghost (Mark 6:49). Jesus identified himself to the disciples then climbs into the boat and the wind stopped. The disciples were astounded by this feat. Mark links the astonishment of the disciples to their lack of understanding about the loaves, which is a result of their hardened hearts (Mark 6:52).

This incident is very similar to the account of the stilling of the storm in chapter

210.

<sup>144</sup> The author of Mark only gives the number of people as 5,000 men.

<sup>145</sup> Hawkin, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," p. 103.

four. There are also differences between these two incidents. There is no storm in chapter 6; instead there is a strong wind which has made rowing difficult, but not impossible. There is no danger as in the storm, there is no risk of loss of life. Instead the sight of Jesus approaching is what frightens the disciples more than the weather. In Mark's account of this event, Jesus is the cause of panic, which he does calm.<sup>146</sup> Jesus does not deliberately frighten the disciples without reason. This is a test of the faith of the disciples, which is necessary after their inability to understand the feeding of the 5,000 which had happened just before this event. This miracle occurs after Jesus has isolated himself from the disciples when he sends them off in the boat, and then from the world when he goes up a mountain to pray. This isolation is what allowed Jesus to see the struggle of the disciples against the wind and what set off the events of this miracle.

The next story of the cycle is the encounter of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. Jesus has travelled outside the area of Galilee, as he had done in chapter five. Jesus has travelled into the region of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus is staying in a house and does not want people to know that he is there. The Syrophoenician woman hears that he is there and goes to see him (Mark 7:25). She is a Gentile, but she has come to Jesus to seek help for her daughter who is possessed by a demon. Jesus rebukes her in a very unflattering way by telling her that "it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). The woman is able to respond to Jesus' rebuke and Jesus is moved to heal her daughter. This story highlights that Jesus came to minister primarily to the

<sup>146</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 97.

Jews. The Jewish people needed someone to come to them, but this story shows that the Gentiles needed help as well.<sup>147</sup>

This healing is followed by more travelling. Jesus leaves Tyre and Sidon and goes back to Galilee by travelling through the Decapolis. While in the Decapolis, Jesus is approached by people who are leading a man who is deaf and unable to speak. The people beg Jesus to heal the man, which Jesus does. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd and restores his speech and hearing. Jesus orders the people not to tell anyone what he had done (Mark 7:36). The people are amazed and zealously proclaim the work that Jesus has done. This miracle occurs in the same area as the exorcism of Legion, and the people had heard of Jesus and what he can do. Jesus takes the man aside in an effort to ensure privacy. Jesus touches the man in this healing which is unusual since physical contact with Jesus is rare in the text. This healing also appears to require some effort on the part of Jesus. He needs privacy to perform this healing, possibly in a need for time to develop a method of healing the man. He looks up to heaven and sighs during the healing, which could suggest that Jesus was tired.<sup>148</sup> The witnesses are excited and hard to contain despite the order from Jesus to keep silent about what he has done. This is similar to other accounts of miracles in which those healed or the miracle witness tell of what has happened, even though Jesus had requested that the matter remain secret on other occasions.

<sup>147</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 87.

<sup>148</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 92-93.



This healing is followed by the feeding of the 4,000, the final story in the bread cycle. There is no location given of where this event takes place. The account begins with the reader being told there was a large crowd that did not have any food. Jesus feels compassion for the hungry people. If they are sent home, they will faint of hunger on the way (Mark 8:3). Jesus asks the disciples for bread and they have seven loaves, as well as several small fish. Jesus blesses the food, breaks it and shares it among the crowd. There was enough food left to fill seven baskets. After the meal Jesus sent the people away and left with the disciples for the district of Dalmanutha (Mark 8:10). This is a symbolic narrative indicating that Gentiles are included in God's plan of salvation. In a similar fashion the feeding of the 5,000 indicates that Jews are included. The event occurs as Jesus is travelling in Gentile territory, it follows the healing of the deaf man that occurred in the Decapolis and Jesus immediately leaves for Dalmanutha, which is also in Gentile territory. The recurrence of the number seven, the number of fish and baskets of left over food, speaks to a Gentile audience as it is a mystical number indicating universality and completeness. The word used for basket, *σπύρις*, refers to a common basket that would likely have been frequently used by Gentiles.<sup>149</sup>

Following the story of the feeding, while in the boat, bread becomes an issue among the disciples in Mark 8:14-21. The disciples have not brought bread and only had one loaf with them for this journey. Jesus then warns them about "the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (Mark 8:15). The disciples continue to talk about not

<sup>149</sup> Hawkin, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," p. 103.

having bread and Jesus questions them, because they do not understand what he is doing. Jesus sees that they have hardened their hearts and can not comprehend what has been happening (Mark 8:17-18). Jesus asks them about the two feeding miracles and how many baskets of left over food had been collected each time. The disciples answer twelve in the first miracle and seven in the second. Jesus questions their inability to understand again (Mark 8:21). The disciples have yet again missed the point of what Jesus is doing. The line of questioning of the disciples used by Jesus serves the purpose of drawing attention to the significance of the numbers. It was Augustine who noted that the numbers 4 (4,000 in the second feeding) and 7 (7 loaves) are *universal* numbers. The numbers 5 (5,000 in the first feeding) and 12 (12 baskets) recall the 5 books of the Torah and the 12 tribes of Israel. The conversation acts as an echo of the feeding miracles as well as the other sea incidents, the calming of the storm and the walking on water.<sup>150</sup>

According to Duling, the story of the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida would fit within the bread cycle, but was moved from its position by the text redactor so that it comes after the feeding of the 4,000. The story fits into the section regarding the theme of the blindness of the disciples. Its new position concludes the bread cycle and opens the section dealing with the blindness theme and marking a transition in the story.<sup>151</sup> Jesus arrives in Bethsaida, and is approached by a group of people who are escorting a blind man, looking for Jesus to heal him. Jesus takes the blind man and goes outside the village

<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing in Mark 4-8: Reading and Rereading," in *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (Summer, 1993), p. 214.

<sup>151</sup> Duling, *The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context*, p. 306.

(Mark 8:23). Jesus lays his hands on the man, and then removes his hands. The man can see people that look like trees. Jesus touches him a second time and the man can see clearly (Mark 8:25) Jesus then dismisses the man and tells him not to return to the village. The placement of the healing of the blind man after the account of Jesus' questioning of the disciples is significant. Jesus had questioned the disciples regarding their ability to see then heals a man of blindness. Mark connects Jesus' healing of the deaf and blind to the disciples ability to hear and see and fully understand what Jesus is doing. Mark may have thought the difficulty in understanding could have been extended to his audience.<sup>152</sup>

The narrative cycles which conclude with the feeding narratives includes examples of the symbolism Mark uses, as well as representations of Mark's socio-economic ideology. The feeding of the 5,000 follows the disciples return from their mission and Jesus learning of the death of John the Baptist. Jesus wants to retreat with the disciples for a time of reflection, but the arrival of the crowds disrupts this time. Jesus expresses compassion for the people who have travelled from their homes and begin to teach and wants to provide food when it gets late. The disciples are less compassionate, believing the crowd should be sent away to find their own food. With food collected from the crowd everyone is able to eat and be satisfied. The food is shared among the crowd, instead of purchased from a marketplace, as the disciples wanted. Mark highlights the importance of the economics of sharing over market economics.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p.105.

<sup>153</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 206.

Mark also uses images from the Hebrew Scriptures in this narrative. The image of the Exodus and God providing food for the Israelites in the wilderness is mirrored in Jesus providing food for the crowds. The story also parallels a narrative from the miracle stories of Elisha in which he feeds a large group of people and had food left over (2 Kings 4:42-44). Elisha's feeding occurs during a time of famine and Jesus may be alluding to such conditions as hunger, tithing and food distributions which Mark already mentions in his text (Mark 2:23-28).<sup>154</sup> The final allusion Mark uses from the Hebrew scripture is the phrase "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). Mark uses the phrase to describe the crowd that has come to Jesus and what led Jesus to feel compassion toward them. Mark's use of the term has political overtones. The term implies political criticism by Mark. Jesus is a leader and organizer, the shepherd, for the people who lacked such leadership. The use of the term recalls the prophets who often criticized the leadership. Mark appears to connect Jesus to the tradition of the prophets who criticized the ruling classes. Jesus provides food for the hungry people. The political economy in Palestine benefits the ruling classes, who act to protect these benefits at the cost of the lower classes.<sup>155</sup> The ruling classes are supposed to act as shepherds for the people, but betray that role for power and wealth.

The feeding of the 4,000 assumes some of the same symbolic elements of the other feeding and Mark quickly sets the scene for the narrative. The readers of the text know that Jesus can feed a multitude of people, now he is feeding a crowd of outsiders,

<sup>154</sup> Myers, *Blinding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 207.

<sup>155</sup> Myers, *Blinding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 209.

the Gentiles.<sup>156</sup> The focus for Jesus is on the problem with sustenance. Jesus does not want to send the people away since they have had nothing to eat in three days and they may faint on the way. Earlier in the Gospel Jesus encountered Pharisees and they had a disagreement regarding fasting. Jesus rejects the piety related to fasting when hunger is a serious problem. Jesus is more concerned with meeting the basic needs of the people, which is what happens in this feeding narrative. The reaction of the disciples is different in this narrative compared to the other feeding. In the first narrative, the disciples express indignation about having to find food for so many people. They would rather send the people away to buy food. In the second feeding the disciples are portrayed as experiencing despair because of Jesus' desire to feed the crowd. They are in the wilderness, removed from the markets and the social order they are accustomed to. They do not know where the resources needed to feed 4,000 are located, yet Jesus manages to feed everyone and have food left over. As in the previous feeding narrative there is enough food remaining after the meal to fill several baskets. Hunger is a universal problem and in the feeding narratives Jesus is offering a humane way to deal with the problem. The feeding narratives symbolically function to show Mark's vision of the "economic satisfaction of the masses and an ideology of sharing."<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing in Mark 4-8: Reading and Rereading," p. 217.

<sup>157</sup> Myers, *Blinding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 210.

### **The Exorcism Cycle**

The bread cycle is composed of several miracles that mirror each other in form, with a focus on Jesus' ministry to the Jews on one hand and Gentiles on the other, that end with the feeding narratives. This is not the only cycle of material in the structure of Mark's Gospel. The exorcism material Mark uses is also organized to show parallels between the Jews and Gentiles and the work of Jesus among them. The ministry of Jesus begins with an exorcism in Capernaum. This event marks the beginning of Jesus' work in Galilee and caught the attention of the authorities. The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac is the first thing Jesus does among the Gentiles. Jesus is shown entering Gentile territory several times in Mark's Gospel following this exorcism. He would perform several miracles and teach during his trips to the Gentile areas along the Sea of Galilee.

The exorcism in the synagogue in Capernaum is Jesus' first public action. The first part of chapter one, describes the beginning of Jesus ministry, his baptism, temptation in the wilderness and the calling of his disciples. This exorcism is Jesus' first action that will draw the attention of the people, who react with amazement to what he has done, which is how people will react to other miracles Jesus will perform during his ministry. According to the author of Mark, Jesus becomes quite famous as a result of performing this miracle and is known throughout the region of Galilee from this point on. With this exorcism Jesus is moved from the margins of society into the centre of the Jewish social order. Jesus performs this exorcism in the synagogue, which is a sacred place, on the Sabbath,

which is sacred time.<sup>158</sup> Jesus is described as having more authority than the scribes (Mark 1:22) and performs the exorcism in the synagogue which was the domain of the scribes. The story establishes the struggle between Jesus and the religious authorities. The exorcism is the means Jesus uses to confront the authorities and assert himself and his alternative viewpoint in a war of myths with the religious authorities.<sup>159</sup>

The exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac occurs on Jesus' first trip into Gentile territory. The location adds another dimension to Jesus' ministry of liberation. In this exorcism, Jesus includes Gentiles as well as Jews as being in need of liberation. The exorcism of Legion has political meaning and the imagery can refer to the Roman military occupation of the area. The first exorcism allows Jesus to confront the Jewish ruling class and the exorcism of the Gerasene allows Jesus to encounter the other element of colonialism in Palestine, the Roman military.<sup>160</sup>

These inaugural exorcisms have similarities that seem to indicate that Mark wanted these stories to be connected. In both stories, Jesus converses with the demoniacs. The demons recognize Jesus and refer to him as the 'Holy One of God' (Mark 1:24) and 'Son of the Most High God' (Mark 5:7). The demons also know that Jesus has the power to destroy or torment them. The parallels between the stories allow Mark to show that Jesus was engaged in a ministry of healing the poor that includes the Jewish people in the

<sup>158</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 141.

<sup>159</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 143.

<sup>160</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 192.

area of Capernaum and the Gentiles when Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee.<sup>161</sup> The parallels in the narratives also show that the exorcisms were symbolically significant. Myers shows that the public symbolic content of the exorcism narratives follow certain criteria (See Appendix 1).

The exorcisms are understood as symbolic in the public sphere. The demoniac becomes symbolic of social tension and anxiety that are the result of the political and religious systems that characterize life in the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee.<sup>162</sup> Mark's use of these narratives speak to the political situation at the time, and portrays Jesus as the solution. Jesus has the authority that elevates him above the religious authorities, liberating people from a strict and oppressive religious system. Jesus also has the power to symbolically liberate the people from the oppression that was felt in dealing with the presence of the Romans.

The initial exorcism occurs in the synagogue, the religious centre of rural areas such as Galilee. Jesus enters into the synagogue on the Sabbath and performs the exorcism. Such activity was strictly prohibited by Jewish law. Jesus has entered the world of the scribes and religious authority and he immediately faces strong opposition. Among the people, he was received as a authoritative teacher unlike any other. This scene introduces the conflict with the authorities that characterized Jesus' public ministry. The demon in the synagogue is symbolic of the scribes and their traditions. The authority of

<sup>161</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 192.

<sup>162</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 193.



the scribes which Jesus surpassed is central to Jewish religious life and influenced the social order.<sup>163</sup> The exorcism of the demon was Jesus' way of asserting his authority. This leads to the confrontation that occurs between Jesus and the authorities in chapter three of the Gospel. Exorcisms are an important part of the ministry that Jesus is embarking on and it is a threat to the political *status quo*. The religious authorities recognize the threat that Jesus poses and struggle to control him. They accuse Jesus of doing the work of Βεελζεβοὺλ (Mark 3:22) in an effort to control and subdue him. Mark portrays the political character of the exorcisms of Jesus as being symbolic action. All the exorcism narratives included in Mark's text, while having differences in tone, deal with the power structures and alienation present in the social sphere.<sup>164</sup>

The other exorcism narratives included in Mark's text include the exorcism of the daughter of a Syrophenician woman and a young boy whom the disciples had been unable to help. These narratives are also an example of Mark's use of symbolic action. The encounter of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman represents the Gentile populations of the area. The interaction of Jews and pagans had increased as a result of the Hellenistic culture of the time. The woman approaching Jesus was a detriment to his honour as a Jewish man. It was not customary for an unknown woman to approach a Jewish man looking for a favour as this woman does, seeking Jesus to heal her daughter. As a result, Jesus' response is understandable in this social context, even expected of him. By

<sup>163</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 143.

<sup>164</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 143.

rebuking the woman, Jesus is defending the collective honour of the Jewish people.<sup>165</sup> The woman responds to Jesus and, in a way, puts him on the defensive. Jesus heals the woman's daughter because of what she says. According to Myers, Jesus is "shamed" into allowing the woman to experience the Kingdom that Jesus advocates. This equalization of status reorders boundaries to allow Gentiles to be seen as equals.<sup>166</sup> This exorcism is paired with a healing that occurs in the Decapolis that furthers the suggestion that the Kingdom was now available to Gentiles as well as Jews. The pairing of the narratives illustrates that Mark organized his text to pass particular themes on to his audience. Here the idea of *inclusion* is very important to the social order that Jesus is creating in Mark's text. Jesus has taken accepted social behaviour that was characteristic of life in the first century, such as the behaviour dealing with honour and shame, and turned it around completely in these narratives. Jesus is establishing a new order that is *open to outcasts and Gentiles*.<sup>167</sup>

The exorcism of the young boy in chapter 9 is the final exorcism Mark includes in the Gospel. As the final account of an exorcism it contains elements of the previous exorcisms and healings that occurred prior to this one. In this story, a man brings his son who has a spirit that has left the boy unable to speak as well as suffer seizures. According to the man, the disciples had already attempted to cast out the spirit but were unsuccessful (Mark 9:18). Jesus appears to be annoyed by the faithlessness he sees, yet he agrees to

<sup>165</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 203.

<sup>166</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 204.

<sup>167</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 205.

help the boy. As soon as the boy is brought to Jesus the spirit causes the boy to convulse. The boy had the spirit since childhood and had fallen into water and fire as a result of the spirit (Mark 9:22). The man believed that Jesus can help the boy and Jesus then drives the spirit out of the boy. After the exorcism the disciples ask why they were unable to drive the spirit out of the boy. Jesus tells them that it was a special type of spirit that can only be cast out with prayer (Mark 9:28-29).

This narrative contains elements of other exorcisms that have already appeared in the text. The exorcism is of a spirit and it left the witnesses amazed as in the Capernaum exorcism at the beginning of the Gospel. The narrative provides details of how the spirit has impacted the well being of the boy, this is similar to the story of the Gerasene Demoniac in which details were given regarding the affects of the demon on the man who was possessed. A parent approaches Jesus seeking help for his child in the same way the Syrophoenician woman approached Jesus on her daughters' behalf. The presence of these subtle allusions to previous accounts shows the reader that healing and exorcisms are to be read as symbolic action.<sup>168</sup>

The structure of the narrative is built around the ideas of faith and doubt. The father in the story is struggling to have faith.<sup>169</sup> He doesn't think there is help for his child since the disciples were unable to drive out the spirit. The dialogue between Jesus and the man regarding faith is the key aspect of the narrative. The man tells Jesus that the

<sup>168</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 254.

<sup>169</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 255.

disciples were unable to drive out the spirit and Jesus appears to be frustrated in his reply. Jesus responds with a question, how much longer will he have to be with the faithless generation (Mark 9: 19) that the man seems to represent. Jesus wonders how much longer he must put up with them. But he wants the boy brought to him. The boy's father thinks that if Jesus is able, he could help and show them compassion. Jesus says that he can help, that anything is possible for those who believe. The father professes his faith by declaring "Θεός εἶμι σου τῆ ἀπιστίας" (Mark 9:24). Jesus drives the spirit out of the boy as a crowd gathers. The narrative does not end with the amazement of the people who witnessed Jesus healing the boy. Instead the narrative ends with the disciples questioning Jesus about why they were unable to cast out the same spirit. The unbelief of the father is not the key issue in the narrative. The narrative is dealing with the unbelief of the disciples. The spirit left the boy unable to hear or speak. This is symbolic of the disciples inability to hear Jesus' teaching or understand the purpose of Jesus' work. The spirit leaves the boy as though he is dead until Jesus intervenes and raises him. The apparent resurrection has further meaning when seen in light of the theme of unbelief. The resurrection of the self into a life of belief seems to be the idea behind the symbolic action of the exorcism. The object of the exorcism is unbelief which is the despair that nothing can really change under the rule of the dominant powers, which result in resignation.<sup>170</sup> According to Jesus, prayer was necessary for the exorcism of the spirit, as it is necessary to the collective struggle against the *status quo* and resignation to the control of the

<sup>170</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 255.

dominant classes.<sup>171</sup>

The narrative of Mark's Gospel presents to its readers a distinct picture of Jesus. The organization of the text stress the importance of the roles of Jesus. Jesus is a healer with many healing miracles included in the text. This dimension of Jesus' ministry puts him at odds with the religious authorities. The importance of the feeding narratives contribute to the presentation of Jesus as the Bread of Life. Jesus serves this function to both Jews and Gentiles in Mark's Gospel.

### **Jesus the Healer**

One of the important dimensions of Jesus' ministry in Galilee was his ability to heal. Mark presents numerous accounts that show Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons. This is an important part of Jesus' mission and revelation and must be viewed as unique. The healing ministry illustrated Jesus' unique authority. Jesus had the authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. While the healings highlight Jesus' authority, they are not only an exhibit of raw power, but the healings also display the power that accompanies the particular authority that Jesus possesses.<sup>172</sup> Jesus had a particular message to share and the healings enforce his authority over that message.

Jesus' authority extends to the social sphere, he incorporates outcasts, the Gentiles, and women into his followers. He also has the authority to initiate the Kingdom of God,

<sup>171</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 256.

<sup>172</sup> Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon*, p. 2.

as well as authority over matters of Jewish law. In Mark, Jesus' authority over the law places him in opposition with the religious leaders especially the Pharisees.

Mark introduces the theme of authority in his account of Jesus' first healing, the exorcism at the synagogue in Capernaum. Mark describes Jesus as teaching with authority, unlike the scribes (Mark 1:22), and those that heard him and witnessed the healing were amazed by the authority he possessed. The authority that Jesus exhibited in this healing contributes to the fame that develops around Jesus, making him well known throughout Galilee. While this is Jesus' initial healing and the beginning of his public ministry, it would have been very controversial. The healing occurs in the synagogue which was off limits to those considered unclean,<sup>175</sup> such as those possessed by spirits. It occurs on the Sabbath, when work of any kind was prohibited by law. Despite the problems the authorities would have had with Jesus and this healing, Mark does not include in his report any reaction by the authorities to the healing.

The authorities did know what Jesus was doing. In chapter 3 of the Gospel, Mark describes the Pharisees plotting against Jesus. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). The Pharisees expect Jesus to heal the man, and wait to see that he does perform the healing so that they can accuse him (Mark 3:2). In Greek the watching by the Pharisees that Mark described was referred to as *παρρησιάζω*, or watching suspiciously. Jesus challenges the authorities by questioning whether or not it is lawful to do good or do harm on the Sabbath (Mark 3:3). Jesus

<sup>175</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 33.

becomes angry as a result of the hardness of heart he sees in the Pharisees when they do not answer, and then heals the man (Mark 3:5). Mark reports that following this encounter the Pharisees, began to conspire with King Herods' supporters against Jesus (Mark 3:6). The collaboration between the Pharisees and the Herodians is surprising, since the Pharisees would not have liked Herod or his supporters. By working together with the Herodians, Mark is stating that the Pharisees saw Jesus as a larger threat.<sup>174</sup> The conflict that occurs between Jesus and the Pharisees directs attention away from the healing in Mark. This conflict with the Pharisees continues throughout Mark's Gospel, resulting in Jesus' death.

The man who is healed is not the focus of the story. The healing is a means of showing the authority of Jesus to heal on the Sabbath. By calling the man to the front of the gathered community and healing his hand, Jesus is performing the healing for the benefit of the Pharisees. They were silent in response to his question about doing good on the Sabbath. Mark describes Jesus as being angry that the Pharisees would not respond, therefore he heals the man with the withered hand as a response to the silence of the Pharisees.<sup>175</sup> The Jewish religious authorities, including the scribes, Pharisees, Chief Priests and Sadducees, are united in their opposition to Jesus.<sup>176</sup> The Sabbath healings that Jesus performed provided the authorities with a reason to plot against him. Jesus was becoming very well known as a healer and teacher. Therefore the Pharisees saw him as a

<sup>174</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 53.

<sup>175</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 54.

<sup>176</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 55.

threat to their position in the community and in their own beliefs, by overturning their own teachings.<sup>177</sup> As the Gospel progresses the conflict between Jesus and the authorities becomes more serious, resulting in the plot to arrest Jesus and have him killed. Following the encounter with the Pharisees in the synagogue, Jesus withdraws to the lake. He is followed by a large crowd of people from all over the area, including people from Gentile regions (Mark 3:8). Jesus heals many people of their illness and casts out demons. The encounter with the Pharisees did not stop Jesus from participating in his healing activities.

The plot of the Pharisees against Jesus adds a political element to what is at first a religious issue. Jesus' healings on the Sabbath are problematic in the religious realm as doing any activity on the Sabbath goes against the religious laws. On a political level Jesus is struggling against the powers who have the religious and social authority. This struggle is evident during the Capernaum stage of Jesus' mission. The mission in Capernaum concludes with an encounter with the authorities that brings the political aspects of Jesus' mission to the attention of the readers of the Gospel. The scribes accuse Jesus of being possessed by a demon, which is the only reason he is able to heal and cast out demons. Jesus responds with the parable of the strong man which can be interpreted to reveal the political purpose of his mission. From this point, Jesus' mission will be carried out across the political landscape of Roman Palestine.<sup>178</sup>

The challenge to the the religious authorities that Jesus issues in the Sabbath

<sup>177</sup> Mackrell, *The Healing Miracles in Mark's Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*, p. 56.

<sup>178</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 140.



healings becomes clearer when the role of exorcism is considered. In the exorcism in the Capernaum synagogue, the demon can be seen as being symbolic of the religious authorities. The religious authorities were central to shaping the Jewish social order.<sup>179</sup> This symbolism adds a new dimension to the exorcism. Jesus enters the synagogue, the domain of the religious authorities and drives out a demon that can be seen as a representation of the authorities. The exorcism of the demon becomes an act of confrontation in which Jesus presents his own authority to the people and presents it as a viable alternative to the authority of the religious leaders. This confrontation leads to the encounter in Mark 3: 22ff.,<sup>180</sup> when Jesus is accused of being possessed by a demon in what appears to be an effort by the authorities to discredit him.

The majority of people that Jesus heals are the poor. Disease was a common problem among those living in poverty and had a large impact on their lives. Disease usually resulted in loss of wages and further impoverishment. Mark portrays the healing mission of Jesus as being linked to the social-economic status of those being healed. The healings Jesus performs are essential to his mission to bring liberation to the oppressed and marginalized.<sup>181</sup> Those suffering from illness would have been marginalized in Jewish society as illness was considered an impurity which justified exclusion.<sup>182</sup> Jesus' healing actions when viewed as symbolic actions can be seen as efforts to create social wholeness. By working to include the people that have been pushed to the margins due to

<sup>179</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 143.

<sup>180</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 143.

<sup>181</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 144.

<sup>182</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 145.

poverty or illness, Jesus was challenging the social order as well as the authorities who uphold that order.<sup>180</sup>

These actions contribute to the hostility that develops between Jesus and the religious authorities. This continues throughout the Gospel, beginning with Jesus' healing activities in Capernaum at the beginning of his mission and coming to an end in Jerusalem with the decision by the Sanhedrin to have Jesus crucified. The mission in Capernaum ends with two accusations: that Jesus is possessed by a demon, made by the authorities, and that he is out of his mind as his family claims (Mark 3:21). The double attack on Jesus at the end of the Capernaum mission causes Jesus to move to a different area, taking his mission to the Gentiles. The scribes saw themselves as God's representatives, therefore Jesus' challenge of their authority was seen as being the work of Satan.<sup>181</sup> It was common for people in power to make accusations against healers who had a positive and political role in the community. As Hollenbach observes, "Witchcraft accusations represent a distancing strategy which seeks to discredit, sever, and deny links . . . These upstart controllers of spirits are, by their very power over the spirits, suspected of causing what they cure."<sup>182</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 146.

<sup>181</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 165.

<sup>182</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," p. 577.

### **Jesus the Bread of Life**

The feeding narratives in Mark's Gospel show how Jesus made his mission available to both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus feeds 5000 people in a Jewish area and followed the miracle with a similar event in which he fed 4000 people in Gentile territory. These narratives show that the message that Jesus was offering was available to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Mark also uses these narratives to portray Jesus as the Bread of Life for both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is shown providing the necessities of life to a large group of Jewish people who have followed him into the wilderness to hear him teach. He does the same thing when in Gentile territory and a large group gathers around him. In both cases Jesus is able to feed these groups by using a small amount of food. Jesus does this rather than listen to the disciples who suggest sending the people into the nearest town to find their own food.

The feedings concern the needy. In both cases the people are removed from their communities, and therefore available food. In these narratives, Jesus acts as an organizer, with the intention of helping the hungry. There is a political criticism implied in the narratives. The people are seen by Jesus as being "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34), causing Jesus to feel compassion towards the Jewish crowds. This phrase has political implications when viewed in the context of the prophets. The phrase was used by the prophets to criticize the leaders in Israel.<sup>106</sup> The criticism can be seen in Ezekiel, in which the leaders, as the shepherds, look after themselves rather than the well-being of

<sup>106</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 208.

the people.

Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the sheep . . . With force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered . . . and they become food for all the wild beasts (Ezekiel 34:2ff.).

When seen in the light of the prophetic tradition, Jesus attending to the hunger of the crowds is a way of criticizing the dominant classes and the political economy that exist in Palestine.<sup>187</sup>

The mission Jesus embarked upon to the Gentile people is shown through Mark's structural organization to run parallel to the ministry in the Jewish territories. The geographical movement as well as the miracles that occur become a means of recognizing the shift to the Gentile mission. Mark's presentation of Gentiles in the Gospel is generally positive. The Gentiles that Jesus has close contact with receive compassion from Jesus, usually displaying a desperate need for help and a strong faith and understanding in Jesus' abilities. While the characterization of the Gentiles in Mark is positive overall, there is also some negative traits attributed to Gentiles which include disobedience, unbelief and opposition to Jesus.<sup>188</sup> The desperation that is experienced by the Gentiles is no different from the desperation seen in the Jews who approach Jesus. Both groups experience the same issues of illness and demon possession.

<sup>187</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 209.

<sup>188</sup> Kelly R. Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: 'Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children's Crumbs'* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), p. 178.

The stories are followed by a discussion between Jesus and the disciples (Mark 8:14-21). The feeding narratives are referred to when Jesus questions the disciples' understanding of what he has done. The conversation shows that the disciples do not understand. Jesus asks them specific questions about the feeding miracles and they know the answers, such as how many baskets of food were collected following each feeding, yet they do not understand the purpose behind the feedings. Jesus is the Bread of Life for the Jews and the Gentiles. His message is available for all people. The inclusion of the Gentiles enforces an important dimension of the message of Jesus; the Kingdom of God is available to anyone who has faith. This dimension of Jesus and the scope of his message is what the disciples do not understand.<sup>188</sup> The disciples appear to resist the feeding of the Gentiles. They want to send the people away to find their own food. They question Jesus' actions of feeding the Gentiles, which they did not do when the Jewish crowd was fed. In the case of the Jewish crowd the disciples offered to go and buy food for the people. They do not understand that Jesus is the Bread for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The disciples appear to resist participating in the Gentile mission.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Hawkin, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," p. 104.

<sup>189</sup> Wefald, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms," p. 20.

#### 4. The Gerasene Demoniac in the Context of Mark's Message

##### **The Markan Jesus**

The structure used by Mark presents a message to his readers regarding the nature of the ministry Jesus undertook in Galilee. Mark presents Jesus as a healer and a teacher who included both Jews and Gentiles. *The story of the Gerasene demoniac is vital to understanding this dimension of Jesus' teaching.* The story is the first account in Mark in which Jesus interacts with Gentiles and heals a Gentile man. Moreover, the symbolic function of the story of the Gerasene Demoniac imparts a theme other than healing to the reader. Understanding the symbolic function of the story allows the reader to see the story as part of the deeper level of meaning found in the Gospel. Jesus is presented in Mark as bringing a message of liberation that is made available in the Kingdom of God that is open to both Jews and Gentiles.

The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as leading a movement that challenged both Jewish religious authority and Roman rule. The issue of Rome becomes more evident in the last chapters of Mark, particularly during the account of Jesus' time in Jerusalem. While there are other biblical texts that are more extreme in their opposition to the Roman Empire, such as *The Book of Revelation*, there are also many texts that are less critical, such as some of the epistles.<sup>191</sup> The Gospel of Mark is not, then, on the extremes of either apologetics or polemics. But it is, nevertheless, clearly critical of both political and

<sup>191</sup> Stephen D. Moore, "Mark and Empire: 'Zealot' and 'Postcolonial' Readings," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 199.

religious authorities. In Mark Jesus teaches his followers not to seek positions of authority, power or wealth. Mark's presentation of the "blindness" or incomprehension of the disciples is Mark's way of making this point, as we have seen above.<sup>192</sup>

The feeding narratives also serve to reveal a symbolic nature of Jesus' ministry. Bread serves as an important symbol in the Gospel. Mark uses these narratives to show that the authorities were unable, or unwilling, to provide for the spiritual welfare of the people because they were protecting their own position. Mark places Jesus in the tradition of the prophets who saw the oppression of the people to be the responsibility of the authorities. The feeding narratives, in which Jesus feeds thousands outside, is held in juxtaposition to the meal held by Herod at the palace (Mark 6:14-29) which immediately precedes the feeding of the 5000. Herod's meal was served to a few people from the upper classes, and it is characterized by the murder of John the Baptist at the request of Herod's wife. The meal served by Jesus to the crowd was the result of his compassion for the people. It is held outside in the wilderness instead of a large palace. The people are all ordinary people who walked to the area from the surrounding rural communities, instead of the powerful and elite that attended Herod's banquet. The differences between classes was a source of conflict. In Mark, Jesus appears to take a stance that promoted the fair treatment of the poor that freed them from the oppression that they suffered at the hands of the ruling groups. In the time of Jesus, the ruling class was made up of a minority that was located in the cities and were willing to culturally and economically accommodate

<sup>192</sup> See discussion on pages 99-102 of this thesis.

the Roman colonial presence in the area. The majority of Palestinians lived in rural areas and the accommodation of the Romans resulted in the economic marginalization and cultural isolation of the rural inhabitants, such as those in Galilee.<sup>193</sup> The effects of the class differences on the poor, rural population and their relationship with the land and traditional property was profound.

By the time of Herod there are arisen many large landed estates. Simultaneous with the growth of these large estates there was a steady increase in population. Some peasant holdings were subdivided, but more often the younger brothers were left landless because of the inheritance laws. Moreover, large numbers of other peasants who had fallen into debt were forced into the ranks of the rural proletariat. Most of these became marginal day-labourers. Herod, and to a degree, his successors employed many of these in elaborate building projects. That these labourers, permanently uprooted from the land, formed a potential source of instability was a fact not lost in the ruling group . . . Thus even without the factor of foreign rule there would have been intense hostility between the common people and the ruling gentry and the chief priests.<sup>194</sup>

The Markan Jesus was very concerned about the welfare of the poor classes and much of his ministry was spent bringing attention to their struggle and the role the authorities played in creating the disparity among the classes.

<sup>193</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 51.

<sup>194</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 51 quoting Richard Horsley "Ancient Jewish Banditry and the Revolt Against Rome, A.D. 66-70" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981), p. 416ff.



### The Markan Message

In Mark, Jesus' work among the poor was important to establishing a new order in which all people were treated fairly. Jesus' work as a healer occurred most frequently among the poor. The people who received healing were doubly oppressed by the established social system. Their illness made them unclean and their poverty was a source of oppression. Jesus' actions freed the people from oppression. The healing of their illness made them clean and able to be reintegrated into the community.<sup>195</sup> Jesus advocated for communities, cooperation, sharing and forgiveness. All people would be included, the sick could be healed and demons cast out. This new social order challenged the religious authorities since it did not have a need for them. Jesus sought to ensure that God was accessible to all people, not confined to the temple, and to democratize Israel.<sup>196</sup> Jesus also rejected the politics and domination of colonialism. Jesus is shown as following the vision of Zechariah in which leaders acted as they did in a period before basic military organization. The ideal leader would be humble and available to the people. Mark recreates this vision when Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem riding a donkey and being welcomed by the people as a king (Mark 11:1-11).<sup>197</sup> Jesus developed a movement that was based on the practice of liberation. The movement Jesus formed was not a secret, it was a way of life and death with a hope for resurrection:

<sup>195</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 445.

<sup>196</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 445.

<sup>197</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 446.

In Galilee, he began to proclaim that the moment had arrived to realize the vision of Yahweh's reign. As a rabbi he gathered a small band of followers, and laboriously instructed them in the paradox, applying it to every area of life. He tried debating with other rabbis, only to get kicked out of several synagogues. He kept on, itinerating [*sic*] around the Galilean villages, a healer, exorcist, and friend to the poor.<sup>198</sup>

According to Mark, when Jesus entered Jerusalem he demonstrated the principles of his movement, resulting in his death.

Mark shows Jesus as a leader of a small group that was seeking renewal and reformation. Jesus begins his movement in a very specific area and expands and moves outward to continue to advance his movement. Jesus eventually moves beyond the confines of the region of Galilee and takes his movement to the Gentiles in the neighbouring areas. Jesus moves to Jerusalem for his final confrontation with the religious and political authorities who he challenged throughout his ministry. Mark is presenting an ideological alternative to the present system.

The relationship between Jesus and the Jewish authorities appears in Mark to be strained. Jesus faces opposition from the scribes as soon as he begins his public ministry. The exorcism of the demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue was the first action that Jesus undertook in his ministry and it was received with amazement from the people. It was not

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<sup>198</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 446.

well received by the authorities. The hostility towards Jesus that was developing on the part of the religious authorities is made evident to Mark's audience in the account of the accusations of demon possession against Jesus. The authorities accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul. The opposition in Galilee begins to increase throughout the course of Jesus' ministry, to the point where the authorities conspire against him (Mark 3:6). As Jesus faces opposition, he begins to withdraw from the crowds that he attracts. He appoints twelve disciples to accompany him.<sup>199</sup>

Mark represents the Jewish authorities as being comprised of three groups, the Herodian nobility, the scribes and the aristocracy in Jerusalem. Each group was opposed to Jesus and his movement during the course of Mark's narrative. Jesus also issued challenges to each group throughout his ministry. Much of the political power of these groups had decreased significantly with the presence of the Romans in the area.<sup>200</sup> Mark is critical of the authorities, and Mark is very critical of the brutal reputation of Herod in Galilee. The story of the death of John the Baptist allows Mark to acknowledge this criticism of the Herodian class. The Herodians are shown to be a threat to Jesus' followers through the death of the Baptist and their role as conspirators with the Pharisees to destroy Jesus.

The scribes are also shown to be the enemies of Jesus. The scribes are influential in both religious and political spheres. They act as political and religious opponents to

<sup>199</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," p. 494.

<sup>200</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 423.

Jesus. They had formed a unique position of power based on legal expertise:

Apart from the chief priests and members of the patrician families, the scribe was the only person who could enter the supreme court, the Sanhedrin . . . When a community was faced with a choice between a layman and a scribe for nomination to the office of elder to a community, of "ruler of the synagogue," or of judge, it invariably preferred the scribe. This means that a large number of important posts hitherto held by priests and laymen of high rank had in the first century A.D., passed entirely, or predominantly, into the hands of the scribes. The title ["Rabbi"], at the beginning of the first century A.D., was undergoing a transition from its former status as a general title of honour to one reserved exclusively for scribes.<sup>201</sup>

Mark is critical of the scribes because they are the developers of the dominant ideology. Mark places Jesus' teachings against this ideology. Mark attacks the position of the scribes and places them in a position of responsibility for the economic exploitation that characterizes rural communities.<sup>202</sup>

Mark is also critical of the priesthood located in Jerusalem. Mark is not concerned with the legitimacy of the priesthood, which was a common dispute in the first century. Mark views the priests as an economic class who had gained control of the temple and

<sup>201</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 424 quoting Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into the Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), p. 236f.

<sup>202</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 425.

therefore authority over the religious life of the people.<sup>203</sup> The priests also gained influence politically as the Romans acknowledged the position of the priests. The priests were given authority over colonial structures by the Romans. Mark conveys his opinions about the Jerusalem hierarchy in his account of Jesus' trial and execution. Mark portrays them as being disdainful of the discontentment of the masses yet in fear of it. They are shown as being manipulative and in collaboration with the Roman representative in Palestine. The hierarchy is shown to clearly act to preserve their own position and power, which Mark wholly rejects.<sup>204</sup>

Mark was not only critical of the Jewish ruling classes, he was also critical of the presence of the Romans in Palestine. As the exorcism in Capernaum was a direct challenge to the Jewish authorities, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac was directed at the Romans. The demon of Roman military occupation has to be subdued and removed from the area. While the imperial reality of the period was definitely an issue for Mark, the exorcism of Legion is about more than the Romans. The concept of domination that was at root in the politics of Palestine in the first century is of primary concern.<sup>205</sup> Jesus becomes an example for the audience of Mark's Gospel of non-violent resistance. The peaceful movement of Jesus was as effective as violent resistance in the period in which Mark composed his Gospel.<sup>206</sup> Mark's Gospel addresses a concern that the social

<sup>203</sup> Control of the temple included the temple treasury. Mark deals with this in his report of the outrage of the priests that was directed towards Jesus following his attack on the temple market (Mark 11: 15-19).

<sup>204</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 425.

<sup>205</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 427.

<sup>206</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 431. Myers goes as far as saying that the cross was a symbol of resistance to Roman imperialism (p. 430).

institutions of the day, with their strict guidelines regarding purity and debt contributed to social stratification and reinforced social segregation between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus' role as a healer and the bread of life for both Jews and Gentiles was a form of defiance.<sup>207</sup> Mark constructs his text and his portrait of Jesus to focus on the institutions that characterizes Palestinian society in the first century. He implicitly criticizes the social practices that contributed to the marginalization of people. Through the teachings and actions of Jesus, Mark promotes a social system that embraces human unity by establishing new economic and social boundaries. This begins with the inclusion of the poor, sick and outcast. It extends to include Gentiles.

The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as including both Jews and Gentiles as recipients of his message. The inclusion of Gentiles is startling as the interaction of Jews and Gentiles was not in accordance with social norms. The inclusion of narratives in which Jesus interacts with Gentiles in the Gospel is therefore significant. The inclusion of the Gentiles enforces a vital dimension of the message of Jesus; the Kingdom of God is inclusive of all peoples. The underlying themes of the encounters of Jesus with Gentiles is their desire for inclusion. For example, in the encounter with the Syrophenician woman, Jesus' initial response is that the children must be fed first (Mark 7:27). The counterargument from the woman that "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" expresses her desire, in starkly picturesque language, to participate in the dispensation that Jesus brings.

<sup>207</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 431.

The encounter with the Syrophenician woman follows a report of a disagreement between the Pharisees and Jesus, on the issue of defilement (Mark 7:1-23). After the encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus goes into Gentile territory where he encounters the Syrophenician woman and heals a deaf man. Mark has further developed the theme of defilement by showing Jesus engaged in behaviour, touching and talking to Gentiles, that was considered to be acts of defilement by the religious authorities. The cause of the encounter was that the authorities noticed that some of the disciples ate with defiled, or unwashed, hands. They ask Jesus about this and Jesus calls them hypocrites and quotes from Isaiah. According to Jesus, defilement is not caused by outside sources. Defilement is the result of things which originate within a person. According to Mark, Jesus declared all food clean (Mark 7: 19) and that contradicted Jewish food laws. Jesus names evil intentions that come from within a person are more problematic such as envy, deceit and slander (Mark 7: 21-23).

The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac is the initial event of the Gentile mission. In the course of the exorcism, Jesus removes things that would have been considered unclean. The demons are removed from the man, allowing him to return to his community and no longer live as an outcast in a graveyard. The swine in the area, which become possessed by the Legion run into the sea and drown, can be seen as a symbol of the unclean state of the Gentiles as seen from the perspective of the Jews.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, Jesus has, in a sense, declared the man clean by removing the Legion of demons and the swine.

<sup>208</sup> Weisfeld, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms," p. 16.

The man who has the demon cast out moves around the Decapolis telling others about what had happened to him (Mark 5:20), spreading Jesus' fame throughout the area.<sup>209</sup> The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac prepares for the rest of the Gentile mission which continues in Mark with the movement of Jesus into the area of Tyre (Mark 7:24).

The Gentiles, then, are part of a new dispensation, a new Israel. As part of the reconstruction of the new Israel, Jesus chooses 12 disciples. After Jesus is rejected in his hometown of Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6), Jesus sends the disciples out on a mission. The disciples are given authority to cast out demons and teach. The mission of the twelve alters the overall mission of Jesus. Jesus' ministry became a mission of restoration of a new Israel, instead of a mission of preaching and converting a small group of followers. The opposition from the Jewish people, as in Nazareth, and the religious authorities allow Jesus to widen his mission.<sup>210</sup> Jesus takes the mission he has started among the Jewish people outside, to the Gentiles. The mission Jesus embarks upon to the Gentile people is shown through Mark's structural organization to run parallel to the ministry in the Jewish territories. The geographical movement as well as the exorcisms becomes a means of recognizing the shift to the Gentile mission.

The disciples do not understand the things that Jesus is doing. A large portion of Mark is spent dealing with the disciples and their lack of understanding which is an important part of Mark's theme of the messianic secret. Following healings and exorcisms

<sup>209</sup> Wefald, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcism," p. 16.

<sup>210</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," p. 495.



Jesus will order the person who has been healed to remain quiet about the events of the healing. In the case of exorcisms Jesus will even order the demons being cast out to be silent. This can be seen in the story of the exorcism in the synagogue in Capernaum. The demon identifies Jesus as the "Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). Jesus rebukes the demon, telling it to be silent. Following this story, Mark tells the reader that Jesus healed many sick and cast out demons in a house in Capernaum. With each exorcism, Jesus would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him (Mark 1:34). In the narrative of the Gerasene demoniac, the first exorcism that Jesus performs among the Gentiles, there is no order for silence. The healed demoniac wants to leave with Jesus. Instead Jesus tells the man to stay behind and tell his friends "how much the Lord has done for you" (Mark 5:19). According to Mark, the man proclaimed through the area of the Decapolis about all that Jesus had done for him. Mark makes it clear however that in Jewish territory Jesus wants to remain hidden and avoid the attention of the public. This secrecy extends to the disciples as well until the halfway point of the text where during a conversation with the disciples Jesus asks them who people think he is. Peter says that he is the messiah and Jesus orders that they keep his identity a secret (Mark 8:27-30). After this declaration by Peter, the disciples still appear to lack understanding about Jesus and his ministry. The disciples are aware of Jesus' identity as the messiah, but they do not understand the nature of Jesus' role as messiah. The secrecy surrounding Jesus as presented to the disciples is different from the secrecy that is demanded of the people Jesus teaches and heals. It is not

a permanent secret.<sup>211</sup> The secret that the disciples are aware of will be told to the public at some point. Following Mark's account of the transfiguration, Jesus instructs the disciples who witnessed it that they must not tell anyone what they had seen until "after the Son of Man had risen from the dead" (Mark 9:9). The secret regarding Jesus' identity can be revealed following the resurrection.

The inability of the disciples to understand Jesus before Peter's declaration of the true identity of Jesus is best seen in Mark's treatment of the narratives that involve bread. The disciples lack of understanding in the conversation that is recorded by Mark in which the feeding miracles are mentioned is also used by Mark to show that Jesus was the Bread of Life for the Jews and Gentiles. In Mark 8:14-21, the disciples are worried that they have no bread. Jesus questions them about the bread and the feeding miracles that occurred among the Jews and Gentiles. The disciples do not understand "about the loaves." The issue is not that the disciples had no bread. The issue that Mark is highlighting for his readers is that the disciples were with Jesus, who is the bread of life of all people, both Jews and Gentiles. This was the underlying message of the feeding miracles. Jesus as the Bread of Life serves as a symbol of the unity of all people, including the oneness of Jews and Gentiles that Jesus advocates.<sup>212</sup> This is central to the new social order that is the basis of Jesus' overall message. Following this account, Mark shows that the disciples begin to gradually understand and are included in the messianic

<sup>211</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Markan Redaction," p. 492

<sup>212</sup> Werner Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1979), p. 40.

secret.<sup>213</sup> The first half of Mark's text deal with the question of who Jesus is, as the disciples try to understand, with the answer being shown through the teachings and actions of Jesus that ends with the reader knowing that Jesus is the Bread of Life for the Jews and Gentiles even if the disciples do not understand this.<sup>214</sup>

The disciples become insiders as the Gospel progresses. The disciples are treated as insiders even though they do not completely understand what exactly they are insiders to. They eventually figure out the secret of Jesus' identity, but fail to understand his destiny. They try to understand why Jesus uses parables in Mark 4:10-12. Jesus responds by telling them they are insiders, and should understand what is being done and what is to come, those on the outside need parables to be able to understand what Jesus is doing:

οὐ μὲν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω  
ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται.

"To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but to the outsiders everything is in parables" (Mark 4:11).<sup>215</sup>

Jesus' explanation of the use of parables creates a distinction between the disciples and the crowds who come to hear Jesus teach. Mark may be using this distinction to speak to the reader. Readers can identify with the disciples as they, like the disciples, receive the explanation of the parables. The literary device of the incomprehension of the disciples is

<sup>213</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," p. 495.

<sup>214</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," p. 496.

<sup>215</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," p. 496.

*typology per contrarium*, as what the disciples fail to understand is what the reader is called upon to understand. The incomprehension of the disciples is a useful tool for Mark as it allows him to state what it is that Jesus was doing, seeking a new order based on the unity of all people. Mark's new scheme introduces a social order that is a reversal of traditional values and judgements.<sup>216</sup> The traditional ways lead to the exclusion and marginalization of many people, while the new proposed way seeks to end this by liberating those who suffer exclusion and marginalization. This is why the actions of Jesus as a healer of the Jews and Gentiles as well as the characterization of Jesus as the bread of life for Jews and Gentiles is so important to Mark's Gospel.

### **Conclusion: "My Name is Legion"**

"Do not torment me . . . My name is Legion" the Gerasene demoniac declares. In other words: "This is who I am. This is what I am. A man possessed by the Legion. A man possessed by the polluting Powers of the land."<sup>217</sup> I am an outcast. Leave me alone. Do not challenge these Powers."

But Jesus does not leave him alone. He does challenge the Powers, and he heals him, that is, makes him whole (σώζω). The Legion is cast out of him, symbolically driven into the sea. The Gerasene demoniac is no longer estranged from his fellow human

<sup>216</sup> Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," p. 500.

<sup>217</sup> Myers refers to the demons as the Powers. Myers, *Blinding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 191.

beings.

The symbolism is unmistakable.<sup>218</sup> The exorcisms are a sign of the coming of the Kingdom when the Powers which divide and oppress and will be overcome. Moreover, as Jesus casts out demons both in a synagogue and in a polluted graveyard in a Gentile region, it is clear that his mission is for all of the marginalized, be they Jew or Gentile.

It has been said of the Gospel of John that its story is so rich that it is like a pool in which a child can play and an elephant can swim. It has almost endless interpretative possibilities. For much of its history the Gospel of Mark has been regarded as an artless, if faithful, story of Jesus. In recent times, however, it has come to be recognized that although Mark is no stylist, being the most grammatically imperfect of all of the Gospels, he, too, has created a narrative for -- to continue with the image -- children and elephants. Mark is a wonderful story teller and his narrative is complex and sophisticated.<sup>219</sup>

Nothing illustrates Mark's narrative prowess better than the story of the Gerasene demoniac. The story may be read on many levels. On the simplest level it is the story of a compassionate Jesus healing a very sick man. But on a deeper level the story reveals much about the social, religious and political conditions of the time and the true significance of Jesus' mission.

We have seen in chapter one how, in the ancient world of Palestine, politics and

<sup>218</sup> Traditionally, there have been three explanations for the use of the name "Legion." First, that it is an attempt at evasion (giving a number instead of a name). Second, that it indicates an experience involving a Legion which lies at the root of the man's madness. Third, it indicates multiple personalities ("we are many"). But the use of "Legion" goes beyond these explanations.

<sup>219</sup> See Stephen Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2008).

religion were inextricably bound together. The great merit of Horsley's work is that he shows how, to fully appreciate the dimensions of Mark's story, one has to appreciate that the worldview of the Jews at the time of Jesus cannot be separated from political realities. Such a realization throws into much starker relief the true significance of the mission of Jesus. Jesus challenges the political and social order of the day in a radical manner. His healings, particularly his exorcisms, are an integral part of that challenge.

Paul Hollenbach's study of exorcisms complements that of Horsley by drawing out the full social and cultural significance of demonic possession at the time of Jesus. Demon possessed people -- demoniacs -- were not simply "mentally ill" people. Their behaviour embodied a whole spectrum of influences and forces. Demoniacs embodied within themselves the cultural, political and religious tensions and conflicts of the time. By healing demoniacs Jesus was not merely curing an individual of mental illness. He was making a statement about the society which had produced such individuals. After he had cured the Gerasene demoniac Jesus instructed him to become once again a functioning member of the community (Mark 5:19). By doing so he was breaking down barriers on a very basic level. For Jesus, people on the margins -- such as the demon possessed -- were no longer to be regarded as outcasts.

Rene Girard's work addresses the psychology of the outcast, specifically the one who is made a scapegoat. The scapegoat functions, in a perverse way, as a unifying figure. The scapegoat becomes the one who is to blame for religious and political discord and as such unifies people against him (or her). Demoniacs often functioned as

scapegoats. When Jesus heals a demoniac, therefore, he is saying that the social order needs to be changed so that it includes, rather than excludes, such marginalized people. Only when the problems of society are addressed on a much deeper level will it function as God wills it. The Kingdom includes everyone. Justice, compassion and mercy are the pillars of the Kingdom. Exclusion, blame and persecution are anathema to it.

One of the great contributions of biblical criticism is to see texts as social products.<sup>220</sup> Biblical texts are a product of their time. The authors of the biblical texts are human beings bound by historical forces and circumstances. Their writings embody a latent content<sup>221</sup> which, when explored, reveals a vast unconscious terrain of conflicting psychic forces arising out of the temporal dynamics of history. The work of Rollins is important in exploring this insight. He alerts us to the fact that our own placement in the historical continuum molds how we view the interpretive process. In a post-Freudian and post-Jungian world we are well positioned to see elements in the text that were not apparent to previous generations. As Rollins poetically puts it, meaning is revealed in a "spectrum of artistic, moral, liturgical, doctrinal, social, spiritual, and cultural expressions designed to speak to and for the full aptitude of the soul."<sup>222</sup>

Mark's story of the Gerasene demoniac is, then, in and of itself, a story richly evocative and replete with meaning. As a story which stands by itself it may take its

<sup>220</sup> See Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (London: SPCK, 1990).

<sup>221</sup> It is Sigmund Freud, of course, who has systematically explored the notion of latent and manifest content, both in dreams and in everyday life. See *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud (Psychopathology of Everyday Life, the Interpretation of Dreams, and Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex)* (New York: Modern Library, 1995).

<sup>222</sup> Rollins, *Soul and Psyche: The Bible in Psychological Perspective*, p. 174.

place alongside the great stories of the bible. But it is also part of a larger story, The Greatest Story Ever Told, as one film maker put it,<sup>223</sup> the story of Jesus. As we have seen, Mark's story of Jesus is no simple narrative. It has a highly complex structure and is multivalent. The tale of the Gerasene demoniac functions within that story as a hermeneutical key which unlocks the deeper meaning of the narrative.

We have seen, in our analysis of the structure of Mark, how he integrates two narrative "cycles" -- the Bread Cycle and the Exorcism Cycle. The two cycles are woven together to elucidate Mark's great theme: Jesus is a universal figure, bringing a message of inclusivity and renewal. He is the great healer who, through his healings (especially the exorcisms) breaks down barriers of exclusion and summons the marginalized to embrace the Kingdom -- God's reign on earth. He is the bringer of a new dispensation, for Jew and for Gentile, and he is the giver of new life. He is the bread of life for Jew and for Gentile.

The Gospel of Mark's message of "wholeness" (σωτηρία) for all rings loud and clear in its pages. The story of the Gerasene demoniac is a crucial building block in this message. Through this story Mark shows how Jesus challenges not only the *status quo* established and maintained by the Jewish religious authorities, but the whole political and social order of the time. The healing of the Gerasene demoniac is an implied criticism of Rome itself. The Book of Revelation was later to liken Rome to a whore and describe in

<sup>223</sup> *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is a 1965 Hollywood version of the life of Jesus produced and directed by George Stevens.



starkly vindictive terms how it would be destroyed.<sup>224</sup> Mark's narrative is much more subtle and far less venomous. But, nevertheless, there can be no doubt for those who read "between the lines" that Mark sees the rule of Rome as exploitative and destructive. It is a rule which marginalizes and oppresses and is the very opposite of the Kingdom of God.

The radical nature of Jesus' teaching and actions can easily be obscured. The Church has often preferred the image of a gentle Jesus, one who is "meek and mild". But Mark's Jesus, at least, is far more like the "immeasurably great Man" who sought to "bend history to his purpose" so beloved by Albert Schweitzer.<sup>225</sup> He is a man<sup>226</sup> who dared to challenge the Powers of his day. He is a man who had a new vision for humanity, a Kingdom into which all are invited -- men and women, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, white and non-white. It is a breath-taking vision which has inspired countless people through the centuries. It is a vision which continues to inspire today.

Και οἱ βόσκοντες αὐτοὺς ἔφυγον καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς  
ἀγρούς· καὶ ἅλθον ἰδεῖν τί ἐστὶν τὸ γεγονός. Καὶ ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν  
Ἰησοῦν, καὶ θεωροῦσιν τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον καθήμενον ἡματισμένον καὶ  
σωφρονοῦντα, τὸν ἐσχισκότα τὸν Λεγῶνα, καὶ ἐροβήθησαν.

<sup>224</sup> See especially Revelation 17, 18 and 19.

<sup>225</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (London: A and C Black, 1910), p. 370.

<sup>226</sup> I am not implying by this statement that Jesus was merely a man. The traditional Christian doctrine is, of course, that Christ was both God and man. A discussion of this paradox is way beyond the scope of this thesis. For an excellent short summary of the issue see Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), p. vii-xv.

### Appendix 1

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Synagogue Exorcism</i>	<i>Gerasene Exorcism</i>
Entrance	Into the synagogue (1:21)	Sea crossing(5:1)
Exit	From the synagogue (1:29)	Returning crossing (5:21)
Symbolic setting	Synagogue on the Sabbath (Jewish)	Decapolis (Gentile); tombs and swine (unclean)
Demoniac's description	A man possessed by an unclean spirit	A man with an unclean spirit
Symbolic representation	scribes	Roman "legions"
Conflict	authority	Colonial occupation
Demoniac's challenge	Shouted: what do you want with us Jesus of Nazareth? .....Holy one of God .....have you come to destroy us?	Shouted at the top of his voice: what do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God .....swear you will not torture me .....(they begged him not to expel them from the country)
Jesus' command	Rebuked, "Be silent and come out of him"	Saying to him, "come out of the man, you unclean spirit"
Demon's capitulation	With a loud cry went out of him	The unclean spirits came out
Crowd Reaction	The people were astonished	They were afraid

Criteria and narrative elements from Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 193.

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