

## Chapter 1

### A Reckless Faith

#### Introduction

This study focuses upon the remarkable way the Gospel of Mark describes the actions of those who have faith. From fishermen who left nets and families to follow Jesus (Mark 1:16-20) to the courage of Joseph of Arimathea in asking Pilate for the body of Jesus (15:43), the Gospel portrays risky faith as the saving response to Jesus. This heedlessness, of course, is no less impressive than the heedless risks Jesus takes to proclaim the kingdom, to defeat the powers of sickness and evil, and, indeed, to challenge and defeat death itself. Mark's unique understanding of faith might best be represented by Blind Bartimaeus who leaps from his place of begging at Jericho's gate, crying out "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (10:47-48) Within this context of reckless faith, we hear Jesus tell his followers once more to take up a cross and follow him (8:34).

The study will constantly invite you to compare conventional piety and religiosity with the active faith Mark portrays: safe religion over against reckless faith. The stories in Mark illustrate various aspects of reckless faith. A woman with a flow of blood dared the shame and ostracism that automatically went with touching a man in public and received healing, not condemnation for her courage (5:25-34). Four men braved the anger of the crowd, not to speak of that of the householder, when they disassembled the roof of a house in Capernaum in order to bring a paralytic to Jesus (2:4). For their faith the man received healing. Yet in other instances the reward, if any, is not obvious, as when a Roman centurion confessed that Jesus was "a son of God" at the foot of the cross (15:39).

The interchanges of Jesus' students with their master follow the rabbinic pattern of student-teacher dialogue in Jewish literature. Students must act foolish or ask foolish questions in order for the master to answer wisely. By adopting this oral form, the author lets us see another aspect of reckless faith, that of the errant student. The students of Jesus do not back off from their role as students but make their mistakes, sometimes egregious mistakes with the same recklessness as outsiders bring the blind and lame to Jesus for healing. They do not understand the parables (4:10). They are afraid of the storm and waken the master to save them (4:35-41) and on a later occasion their fear makes them think Jesus is a ghost (6:49). They did not understand the miracle of the loaves (6:52); and when faced with another hungry crowd they do not know what to do (8:17, 21). Even Peter's threefold denial did not separate him from the company of students (14:66-72).

Not all respond to Jesus in faith. Some oppose him. Some are unconvinced by him. Some seek his downfall.

The besetting sin in Mark, however, is neither hardness of heart (stupidity) nor lack of right belief about Jesus. Instead, it is the conviction that Jesus' works are the works of Satan and not those of God that amounts to the "eternal sin" (3:29). The disbelieving, the foolish, the hard of heart are not lost any more than Peter is lost. We discover, indeed, that Jesus himself preaches and acts in such a way as to blind the eyes of those who would see and block their understanding in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 6:9-10; Mark 4:11-12). As Wilhelm Wrede noted so long ago,<sup>1</sup> Jesus in Mark's Gospel is creating the atmosphere in which Israel might do the unthinkable: crucify the Messiah. The "messianic secret" depends upon this misunderstanding, this "hardness of heart" in order for the saving events of the Gospel to take place. From the disbelieving Pharisees to the clueless Pilate, all have their roles to play in the divine drama. Indeed, nobody in Mark is ever accused of committing the "eternal sin," not even Judas the betrayer. Judas' act of perfidy is no less important in the scheme of redemption than that of any other actor except Jesus.

These themes offer you opportunities to consider the problems of an absolutist religion, an understanding of Christianity that demands that those who do not agree either be silent or submit to true teaching. In a typically Anglican way we shall be finding ourselves discussing the question as to whether we can long survive and flourish as an open and widely tolerant body. Recent events that have threatened the Anglican Communion will make for the discussion. Is faithfulness a matter of being right or a matter of taking the risks of faith? Can we bear to be disciples who err, who are fearful, who suffer rebuke or must we understand our discipleship to be principally the avoiding of mistakes?

The last words of the Gospel, at least as our best texts have preserved them, are *efobounto gar*, "for they were afraid" (16:8). The women who found the tomb empty did not rejoice at the words of the young man in the white *stolē* but left the garden trembling with fear and telling no one about what they had seen and heard. These words, *efobounto gar*, express the ironic position of followers both ancient and modern who are called to take up their crosses but just as often succumb to their fears.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1901). The English translation is that of J. C. G. Greig, *The Messianic Secret* (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1971).

## The World of Jesus and His Students<sup>2</sup>

This course is about discipleship, about being students. The English word “disciple” is the usual translation in English Bibles of the Greek word **μαθητής** (*mathetes*), but the word is simply the ordinary Greek word for a student or pupil. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus is a teacher surrounded by students. The students of Jesus address him in the Gospel with terms that are appropriate for a teacher as do others outside of his circle. Most often, the word is simply the Greek word for teacher, **διδάσκαλος** (*didaskalos*).<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the word is in Hebrew **רַבִּי**(*rabbi*)<sup>4</sup> or in Aramaic **רַבְּבֻנִי**(*rabbouni*)<sup>5</sup>

We are indebted to Robert P. Meye for his reminder that Mark, as much as Matthew or Luke, emphasizes the teaching of Jesus and associates this with Jesus’ messianic role.<sup>6</sup> The teaching ministry of Jesus, therefore, belongs to an early stage in the tradition.<sup>7</sup> Discipleship in Mark is based upon the familiar relationship of master to pupil in a school where the practice of Judaism is the chief subject matter, a relationship prefigured in the wisdom tradition of the Bible and especially in the work of Jesus ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus).

In Mark, “house” or “home” –there is no distinction in Greek—is an expression Mark uses to distinguish the private world from the public world, especially the world of the crowds.<sup>8</sup> Although Jesus often teaches for public consumption, he is daily involved in

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<sup>2</sup> See the important study of Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSS; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) and his equally important *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 1986. Best believes that Mark presents the relationship of Jesus to the disciples in the Galilee and on the way from the Galilee to Jerusalem as a figure of the Christian “way” or pilgrimage. Best understands Mark to be creating a picture of a holy pilgrimage much as the author of Hebrews did. On the figure of pilgrimage in Hebrews see. E. Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck / Ruprecht, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:51.

<sup>6</sup> Robert P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> While the arguments for the historicity of the tradition of the Twelve in Mark reflect an ambiguity about Form Criticism characteristic of the middle of the twentieth century, Meye does not distract himself badly from his analysis by indulging in this speculative undertaking.

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Mann, *Mark* (“Anchor Bible” 27; Garden City and New York: Doubleday, 1986), 252, points this out very cogently, which should remind us that the issue surrounding the use of **οἶκος** in Mark is seldom the historical question of whose house or home is at issue but is, rather, the literary sign of the

the instruction of his students, and Mark sometimes uses the expression “at home,” or “in the house” to stand for the place of this private instruction as in Mark 3:20; 7:17; 9:28; 10:10.<sup>9</sup> This usage may relate to the custom of calling the “school” of a great teacher such as Hillel or Shammai “the house of Hillel” or “the house of Shammai.”<sup>10</sup> The students of Jesus, his disciples, will be the ones who will continue his teaching as the schools of Hillel and Shammai continued the teaching of their great masters.

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon has argued that “house” in Mark in some sense replaces the synagogue as the place of teaching, showing how Jesus’ power has in some sense extended beyond the realm of sacred space.<sup>11</sup> Although this view is part of a complete literary analysis, this element of Malbon’s argument is challenged by the commonplace use of “house” for “school” in early Rabbinic tradition. Even when “house” in Mark is an actual structure, the meaning of “school” is not far removed from it.

Students in dialogue with their teachers sometimes get the right answer. In Mark 8:27-30 Jesus asks his students who people are saying he is, and they give a list of candidates: John the Baptizer, Elijah, or one of the prophets (Mark 8:28). When he asks their own opinion, though, Peter speaks up to identify Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:39). That may have been the right answer, but according to Mark, Jesus did not heap praise upon his star pupil as Matthew’s Gospel described.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the lesson ends with a warning to Peter not to tell anyone.

When Jesus teaches in public it is often necessary for him to supply the answers since the crowds can’t be presumed to know his teaching. In Mark 3:4 he asked those assembled in the synagogue as to whether it was lawful on the Sabbath to do good or evil, to save life or to kill. Either the congregants did not know or did not want to answer. In

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world of private affairs, including, of course, the instruction of students. Vincent Taylor moved along the same lines when he pointed out that “crowd” and “house” were “simple aids” the author uses in telling the story of Jesus. See Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1959), 235.

<sup>9</sup> Also the expression **kat'ijlian** 4:34; 9:2, 28; 13:3 can be used in this sense.

<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew construct is **ת"ב** *beyt*, and the Aramaic is **ב"ב** *bey*. The meaning is to a school in the sense of a grouping of scholars who follow the teaching of a particular Rabbi.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 131-136.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 8:31. See Matthew 16:17: “You are blessed, Simon ben Jonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you but my Father who is in the heavens.”

either event, Jesus was angry at their stupidity (“hardness of heart,” Mark 3:5).<sup>13</sup> The answer was in the healing of a man’s withered hand.

#### The Secret of the Kingdom (Mark 4)

If Jesus was a teacher, what did he teach his students? What made it worthwhile for them to leave their homes to follow him from place to place instead of earning a living? That the learning of the Rabbis was very great even in such subjects as mathematics and astronomy is beyond question,<sup>14</sup> but the Rabbinic literature itself mainly reflects the teaching of what we might think of as religious subjects.<sup>15</sup> The biblical book Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira, is a compilation of teachings for young men delivered by a second-century BCE teacher in Jerusalem. It too treats mainly of religious matters. At the same time, we much recognize that the division between the secular and the religious was unknown to these teachers or to their pupils and is, more or less, a product of our own modern period. To know the history of the people of Israel, to digest the teaching of Israel’s great sages is to be educated in a proud tradition.

Jesus educated his students in subjects other teachers taught, and like other teachers he taught by example as well as precept. Education in the ancient world was a matter not only of learning the intellectual content of the teacher’s doctrine but mastering its application to life. So, then, in Mark 3:1-6 we have Jesus entering “the synagogue” on a Sabbath and finding there a man with a withered hand. The healing of the man’s hand is an occasion for Jesus to ask the question: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4)

The question is important. The general Rabbinic rule is that things one could do on the eve of the Sabbath should not be done on the Sabbath itself.<sup>16</sup> That rule applies

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<sup>13</sup> The term *skl hrokardia* occurs in Deuteronomy 10:16 (LXX) where the Hebrew reads ומלתם וערלת לבבכם וערפכם לא תקשו עוד. The LXX reading differs significantly from the MT: καὶ περιτεμεῖσθε τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν καὶ τὸν τράχηλον ὑμῶν οὐ σκληροσυνεῖτε ἔτι. In the LXX it is the hardened heart that must suffer circumcision, whereas in the MT the heart must suffer circumcision so as not to result in a hardening of the neck.

<sup>14</sup> See W. M. Feldman, *Rabbinical Mathematics and Astronomy* (3d ed., rev.; New York: Hermon Press, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> That school children learned such religious subjects can be shown by passages like *t. b. Berakot* 53b that famously raises the question as to whether one should reply “Amen” to the prayer of a school child. Such passages, however, probably relate to a period in Jewish life after the time of Mark’s Gospel.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, *m. Menachot* 11:3: כל מלאכה שאפשר לה לעשות מערב שבת אינה דוחה את השבת. “Every action for which it is possible to do it from the Eve of the Sabbath does not release the Sabbath regulations.” See *m. Shabbat* 19:3 with slightly different wording.

equally to medicinal matters as well. One may, for instance, put a salve on an injured eye or bind a wound on the Eve of the Sabbath and allow the healing to continue over the course of the Sabbath,<sup>17</sup> but by implication it would not be allowable to apply these treatments on the day of the Sabbath. In general, almost anything may be done to save life:

A Master has said, “There is nothing for you that would stand before *piquax nefesh* (“danger to life”)<sup>18</sup> except idolatry, incest, and bloodshed.”  
(*t. b. Shabbat* 19a)

Even more specifically than this, in reference to the Sabbath, the *m. Yoma* 8:6 summarizes: “All doubt about life suspends the Sabbath (rules).” So when Jesus asks the question, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? (Mark 3:4),” the answer to the “save life” part is something that Jewish tradition seems to have settled.<sup>19</sup> Of course, one may argue that there was no new risk to the man’s life and so Jesus might well have decided to refrain from healing him until sundown when the Sabbath ended. Jesus’ healing here is not simply an application of the Rabbinic rule.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Jesus has already performed one healing in Mark in a synagogue on the Sabbath without any question of it being appropriate to do so (Mark 1:23-28), and on the same Sabbath he left the synagogue and cured Peter’s mother-in-law of her fever (Mark 1:29-31), also without anyone questioning his right to heal her on the Sabbath.

We should conclude from this that the point of the story is not to solve a halakic<sup>21</sup> problem that, in fact, did not really exist.<sup>22</sup> Jesus does not claim that any of his Sabbath

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<sup>17</sup> *T. b. Shabbat* 18a.

<sup>18</sup> פיקוח נפש is a *terminus technicus* in the Talmud for any threat to life at all.

<sup>19</sup> On this see Mann, *Mark* 241-242.

<sup>20</sup> D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), 109, sees correctly that Mark has Jesus going beyond the exception of פיקוח נפש (“danger to life”), but he concludes that Jesus’ point here is that under certain extraordinary situations there should be an exception. One might wonder, though, what might qualify as special circumstances here. The man was incapacitated before the Sabbath and, likely, would also be incapacitated that evening. What was the urgency for healing his hand?

<sup>21</sup> The term “halakic” may be an unfamiliar adjective to some readers. It is an adjective that points to rules of conduct in Jewish law. A given rule would be a matter of הלכה *halaxah* such as the rule against eating milk and meat dishes at the same meal. The noun comes from the verb הלך meaning “go” or “walk.” Biblical interpretation designed to discover the rules for living, generally the older Rabbinic interpretation, is sometimes called “Halakic Midrash.”

<sup>22</sup> One might argue that point, at least for the Qumran community, in light of the Damascus Document’s listing of Sabbath prohibitions which include the prohibition of lifting an animal from a well or

healings involve *piquax nefesh*, and he does not argue, as he appears to argue later in Mark 7:1-22, that digressions from the law should be judged in terms of their relationship to the human heart. Only the reference to “saving life” in Mark 3:4 reminds us of the Rabbinic discussion. We may expect that the lesson is about something else entirely.

In Zephaniah 1:12 the prophet speaks doom to the indolent men of Jerusalem “who say in their heart, ‘the LORD will not do good and will not do evil.’” In the Greek of the LXX the words are very similar to those of Jesus:

**Ou)mh\ a)gaqopoihsv kurioj ou)l' Ecestin toij sabbasin a)gaqoh**  
**ou)mh\ kakwsv ... (Zephaniah 1:12) poihsai hlkakopoihsai ... (Mark 3:4)**

The issue in Zephaniah is the case of those in Jerusalem who say that God will not act. The expression “do good and do evil” means “do anything at all.” According to the prophet, those lazy Jerusalemites will discover to their horror that God can indeed act. The expression in Mark 3:4 uses the same verbs and evokes a memory of Zephaniah’s prophecy, and so the reader who knows the scriptures will recognize that the question is whether God is at work through Jesus on the Sabbath, and, one assumes, at any other time. The following elaboration “to save life or to kill” amplifies the question but does not add to it materially. By following the practice of the Semitic languages to define a thing by its extremes (Ex.: “the quick and the dead” = “all human beings”), the question of God’s power through Jesus is at the fore.

Apophthegms<sup>23</sup> work this way. Apophthegms are stories that exist to feature or explain a difficult saying of Jesus. The story supports the saying of Jesus, and the way one tells the difference, say, between a legend in which Jesus speaks or a miracle story in which the Master utters some words is to determine whether the words or the story are the important thing. Vincent Taylor lists some twenty narratives in Mark that belong to

pit on the Sabbath 11.13-14 or offer a rope or a ladder to someone who has fallen into the water (11.16-17). The sharpening of the Sabbath law among the members of the Qumran sect, however, should not be of any great surprise, given the community’s perfectionist attitudes toward the law.

<sup>23</sup> The term “apophthegms” (also spelled “apothegm”) is the one preferred by Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1961), 39-73. The English translation of this important work by John Marsh as *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) has not met with universal approval, but it is still very useful to the English-only reader. For a useful summary of the terminology used by form critics to describe this oral form, see Taylor, *Mark*, 78-79. Taylor, for his part, prefers the term Pronouncement-Story, and that term has become common in the English-speaking world of New Testament scholarship. Because, however, some students confuse pronouncement stories with sayings, I have found it helpful to keep the unusual term Apophthegm—along with its unusual spelling—for purposes of differentiation.

this category.<sup>24</sup> This oral form is one of the principal ways Mark transmits the tradition of Jesus' teaching to his students and to the crowds. Mark lacks a Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) or Sermon on the Plain (Luke). For this Gospel teaching is teaching in action.

So in this story the healing of the man's hand answers the question Jesus posed about God being active through the work of Jesus. Just as the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-10 had proved that Jesus could forgive sins against God alone,<sup>25</sup> just so this healing showed God's ability to work through Jesus.

In chapter 4 Jesus does not explain the parable of the sower which he taught to a large crowd by the Sea of Galilee. Instead, he leaves them in Mark 4:9 with the enigmatic, "Whoever has ears to hear, let that one hear." Yet to his students in private, Jesus not only explains this parable but explains why he does everything in parables (Mark 4:10-32). Mark summarizes the difference between the public and private teaching as follows:

And with so many parables like this he was speaking the word to them as they were able to hear. But without a parable he was not speaking to them; but privately with his own students he explained all. (Mark 4:33-34)

#### The Debate About Divorce (Mark 10:2-12)

Good teachers also know when they are being baited, and Jesus in Mark is no exception. In Mark 10:2 the Pharisees approach Jesus to "test" him. Perhaps the Pharisees in question can be excused for not knowing that Jesus has already passed a much more difficult "testing" than anything they can provide, namely the "testing" Satan dished out to Jesus in the wilderness of Judea (Mark 1:13).<sup>26</sup> True to good Pharisaic practice, Jesus gets his interrogators to identify the single passage in the Hebrew Bible that specifies both the means and the grounds for divorce, Deuteronomy 24:1. In that verse is the strange Hebrew expression for the only allowable grounds for divorce: ערוות דבר (*ervat davar*, literally, "nakedness of a thing"). The two great Pharisaic schools differed on the meaning of this phrase with the School of Shammai focusing on the "nakedness" and interpreting the only grounds for divorce as being lewdness of some kind, and the School

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<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *Mark* 78-79.

<sup>25</sup> See below, Chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that English translations ordinarily render **peirazomenoj** in Mark 1:13 as "tempted" and **peirazontej** in 10:2 as "testing" makes it impossible for the English-only reader to see that the passages both have to do with the "testing" of Jesus.

of Hillel focusing on the “thing,” *i. e.* “anything at all.” We are on familiar ground for the Pharisees. Surely they will be able to argue Jesus into a corner no matter which position he takes.

Jesus will not play this semantic game.

Instead of siding with either the *ervat*-crowd or the *davar*-crowd, Jesus points to the copious evidence from the creation stories in Genesis that make it clear that God intended man and woman to live together, and so no quibbling over a single phrase in a single verse in Deuteronomy is going to negate that clear witness. So why did Moses give any directions at all about divorce? Jesus declares that it must be a concession to their stupidity (“hardness of heart,” Mark 10:5).<sup>27</sup>

Christian interpreters have jumped on the fact that the rules in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4 are not exactly commandments and so, perhaps do not give Israelite men the unqualified right to separate themselves from their wives.<sup>28</sup> This specious interpretation substitutes form for content. Walter Schmithals correctly notes that the rules in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4 belong to what biblical scholars call “casuistic law,”<sup>29</sup> or “case law.” To be sure the rules are not uttered in “apodictic” or “commandment” format.<sup>30</sup> Does that difference keep it from being law? Deuteronomy 24:1-4 contains scriptural law in its casuistic rather than in its apodictic formulation; and as such, the passage contains the biblical law—the only biblical law—that applies directly to the question of the permissibility of divorce. It is the only law in scripture that deals with the matter of

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<sup>27</sup> See above, n 9.

<sup>28</sup> Recently, for instance, this point was made again by Marion C. Moeser, *The Anecdote in Mark, the Classical World, and the Rabbis* (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplements* 227; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 222. See also Dieter Lührmann, *Das Markusevangelium* (*HNT* 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987) 169.

<sup>29</sup> Walter Schmithals, *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Kapitel 9,2–16* („Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament“ 2/2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1979) 438.

<sup>30</sup> The distinction between apodictic and casuistic law goes back to the formative essay by Albrecht Alt, *Die Ursprünge des israelitischen Rechts* („Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Klasse“; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1934). The English translation by R. A. Wilson is in Albrecht Alt, *Essays On Old Testament History And Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 101-171. For a quick and correct summary of the differences in English, see the article by Rifat Sonsino, “Law: Forms of Biblical Law,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, electronic edition. One might also consult my article: F. L. Horton, 1971. A Reassessment of the Legal Forms in the Pentateuch and their Functions,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1971) 2: 359–360.

divorce. Schmithals himself, though, tries to avoid the implication of his own insight by contending that the real question is whether divorce is permissible at all.<sup>31</sup> If that is the real question, then it is easy to answer for anyone who knows the scriptures: A man may divorce his wife.<sup>32</sup>

How did Jesus know to dismiss the only materially relevant passage about divorce in scripture? How is it that Jesus gives the force of law to texts from the Book of Genesis that are neither casuistic nor apodictic law? The rule Jesus pronounces against divorce and remarriage comes very close to the kind of language Ernesto Grassi calls “sacred language,” language that pronounces religious truth or instruction without proof.<sup>33</sup> George Kennedy is not convinced that the teachings of Jesus fall exactly into this category, preferring, instead to use the classical term *entheme*, a teaching that has some reasons for propounding it but not a full argument in support of it.<sup>34</sup> Whether “sacred language” or *entheme*, however, the teaching is surprising because the implications are potentially so staggering. Are there also other laws in scripture that Moses penned only for our hardness of heart? Do the laws of כְּשֵׁרוּת (*kashrut*, “laws of clean and unclean”) fall into this category, or some of them? Would thievery or murder be allowed those who do not suffer from hardness of heart? Although the text raises none of these questions, they may serve to remind us how precarious this pronouncement is, how daring and dangerous one might perceive it to be.

There the matter stands for the Pharisees. Jesus has not intervened in the dispute between the two schools. Only “in the house”<sup>35</sup> with his students does Jesus explain his teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage (Mark 10:10-12).<sup>36</sup> In some ways this

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<sup>31</sup> “Die Frage der Pharisäer zielt allerdings nicht auf diesen kasuistischen Streitfall, sondern auf die Erlaubnis zur Ehescheidung überhaupt.” Schmithals, 438.

<sup>32</sup> See on this Wolfgang Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (“Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament, DNTD Ergänzungsreihe 4” 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 96.

<sup>33</sup> Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 103-104. The five characteristics of such “sacred language” are (1) evangelical in character without a demonstrative function; (2) formulated without mediation; (3) metaphorical; (4) absolute and urgent; and (5) outside of time.

<sup>34</sup> George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (“Studies in Religion”; Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> This reference shows clearly the literary nature of the “house” references. Jesus has no home in Judea that Mark describes.

<sup>36</sup> Morna D. Hooker expresses the very interesting idea that the private saying is presented by Mark as something of a “community rule,” not unlike the IQS of Qumran. See Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (“Black’s New Testament Commentaries”; London: Black, 1991), 236. See

in-house teaching is less controversial and difficult than its public expression to the Pharisees unless one believes that inclusion of the possibility of a woman divorcing her husband is on the same order of importance as the prohibition of divorce and remarriage. In Jewish law women do not divorce their husbands, and Josephus tells us the story of Salome, who divorced her husband Costobarus after a quarrel.<sup>37</sup> These facts, however, do not tell the entire story. Indeed, women may indeed force their husbands to divorce them under certain circumstances.<sup>38</sup> The reference here is not to Roman practice or even to the somewhat liberal divorce rules witnessed to in the Elephantine Papyri<sup>39</sup> but to the reality of Jewish life that made it at least conceivable that a woman should force a separation and divorce. Within that context, Jesus' teaching makes sense. Vincent Taylor is correct to see in verses 10-12 an addition to the public discussion.<sup>40</sup> The shock is in the public teaching, not in its private elaboration, and in the private teaching Jesus does not provide any additional rationale for his teaching.

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also James R. Mueller, "The Temple Scroll and the Gospel Divorce Texts" *Revue de Qumrân* 10/2 (1980): 247-256, who deals with three Dead Sea texts: 11QTemple 47.17-19, 11QTemple 66.11-17, CD 4.19-5:11. This reminds us that the matter was not only of concern to Pharisees. Could women instigate divorce proceedings in ancient Judaism? Bernadette J. Brooten, "Konnten Frauen im alten Judentum die Scheidung betreiben : Überlegungen zu Mk 10:11-12 und 1 Kor 7:10-11," *Evangelische-Theologie*. 42 (1982): 65-80, believes that our passage plus other Jewish sources like Josephus, the Elephantine Papyri, and documents from the Dead Sea as well as 1 Corinthians 7:10 indicate otherwise.

<sup>37</sup> *Antiquities* 15.7.10. Josephus mentions that this was not in accordance with the practice of her own people but was consistent with the prevailing Roman law.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, *m. Nedarim* 11:12.

<sup>39</sup> Nos. 9 and 15 of A. E. Cowley's *Aramaic Papyri Of The Fifth Century B. C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), present examples of women divorcing their husbands. Clearly, however, this never became a general practice among Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman world.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Mark* 419. He is also quite correct to argue against verses 10-12 as showing particular accommodation to Roman law.