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HONOR GAINED, LOST, AND RESTORED:
THE HONOR AND SHAME OF JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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HONOR GAINED, LOST, AND RESTORED:
THE HONOR AND SHAME OF JESUS
IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

with a

Major in Religious Studies

by

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May 15, 2021

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Honor Gained, Lost, and Restored:
The Honor and Shame of Jesus
in the Gospel of Mark

Advisor: Professor Mark Chancey
Doctor of Philosophy conferred May 15, 2021
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Tracing the Gospel of Mark's full narrative trajectory, this project provides a socio-literary investigation of Jesus's honor in the Gospel, in order to explore the relationship between honor and shame in the narrative as well as how first-century notions of honor relate to Mark's endorsement of Jesus. For much of the narrative, the Gospel of Mark overwhelmingly features Jesus's honor—or his status, reputation, and virtue. Beginning about halfway through the Gospel, this emphasis is paired with another: anticipation of a change of fortunes for Jesus. Then, Jesus's fortunes do change in the spiraling shame he experiences during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion in Mark 14–15, when he is rejected and abandoned by everyone around him, seemingly even God. Nonetheless, in the final few scenes of the Gospel, from the moment of Jesus's death through his resurrection, the Gospel features the selectively resurgent divine and human affirmation of Jesus, which restores Jesus's honor for the narrative audience and partially rebuilds his reputation among characters in the story. Overall, after firmly establishing Jesus's honor, the Gospel highlights Jesus's intensely shameful suffering and loss of public status in order to differentiate between popularity and fame on the one hand and virtue on the other. Ultimately, Mark promotes Jesus as an honorable agent of God who merits following regardless of the conclusions of human courts of opinion, though characters from all sorts of groups (e.g., disciples, Jewish leaders, Roman agents) do recognize Jesus's honor even after his horrific crucifixion. In its analysis, this project emphasizes the multivalent relationship

between Mark and culture, pushing back against a current trend in some scholarly circles to read the Gospel as simply countercultural.

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To Saxon, who took a huge leap of faith so that I could pursue my dreams, and to Ava: may you
find dreams worth pursuing and seek after them courageously.

INTRODUCTION

The values of honor and shame, while themselves not necessarily fundamental across all cultures, relate fundamentally to something of concern to most cultures: the assessment of one's worth by others. In its portrayal of Jesus, the Gospel of Mark seems to have two drastically different emphases. The first is a Jesus who is characterized by popularity, power, and glory in 1:1–8:26. The second is a Jesus who is characterized by rejection and suffering from 8:27 forward. In an effort to understand the relationship between these “two” Jesuses, many scholars have read the Gospel to promote suffering as the true meaning of Jesus's messiahship over against the idea that Jesus's messiahship is about power and glory; however, this reading fails to recognize that Jesus's popularity, power, and glory actually remain central until partway through Mark 14.

Recently, certain scholars have taken up the question of Mark's seemingly disparate emphases by focusing on the cultural values of honor and shame. In particular, David F. Watson and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon each understand Jesus to reject honor in some way throughout Mark.¹ Adam Winn argues that Jesus's efforts to resist honor actually build his honor, and that Mark mitigates Jesus's shame on the cross by transforming Jesus's suffering into something honorable.² Raquel A. St. Clair, whose analysis focuses heavily on Mark 8:31–38 and the preceding chapters

¹ David F. Watson, *Honor among Christians: The Cultural Key to the Messianic Secret* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010); Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009); Malbon, “History, Theology, Story: Re-Contextualizing Mark's ‘Messianic Secret’ as Characterization,” in *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Matthew Ryan Hauge (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 35–56.

² Esp. Adam Winn, “Resisting Honor: The Markan Secrecy Motif and Roman Political Ideology,” *JBL* 133 (2014): 583–601; Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology under Caesar: Jesus The Messiah and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

rather than extending through the passion narrative, contends that the Gospel anticipates Jesus's shameful crucifixion but also, by associating Jesus's honor with that which comes from God, establishes that honor in contrast to the so-called honor he receives from human characters early on in the Gospel.³ Watson, Malbon, and St. Clair all argue that Jesus's honor is, to a significant extent, countercultural.

To date, scholars who interpret Mark by focusing on honor have not explored the possibility that the author of Mark wishes *both* to promote Jesus's honor throughout the narrative arc, most often by drawing upon culturally established notions of honor, *and* to emphasize Jesus's suffering in Mark 14–15 as shameful, also in keeping with cultural notions of honor. Reading the text in light of a framework for first-century Roman honor and comparing Mark's plot trajectory and literary features to the ancient Greek novels, in this work, I argue that the Gospel promotes Jesus's honor as something that is jeopardized in the course of the narrative and then restored only after intensely shameful suffering. In so doing, I take seriously the Gospel's emphasis on Jesus's suffering and shame while accounting for the narrative's otherwise prominent emphasis on his honor.

The approach of the project is socio-literary: I combine social criticism and literary criticism as I consider both the Gospel of Mark as a narrative and how the social, cultural, and political context of the first-century CE Roman Empire affects the telling of that narrative. Especially important are notions of honor in the early imperial period. Therefore, while this project is an analysis of the Gospel of Mark, the focus on honor necessitates the use of other texts and data sources for understanding first-century Roman notions of honor. I establish a conceptual framework for honor and shame by drawing upon classicists such as J. E. Lendon and Carlin A. Barton and by engaging epigraphic and especially literary evidence from Mark's era.⁴ This literary evidence includes

³ Raquel A. St. Clair, *Call and Consequences: A Womanist Reading of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

genres such as epic poetry, odes, moral essays, Stoic didactic teachings, historical texts, and Greek and Roman novels. The Greek novels are of particular importance as a point of comparison to the plot progression and literary techniques found in Mark. They reflect the same narrative pattern of establishment of honor, loss of honor, and restoration of honor as that which is found in Mark, and one novel in particular employs prophecy to create suspense similarly to Mark. These novels had a considerable impact on Roman culture, as is evidenced by Petronius's parodic Latin novel *Satyricon*, likely written in the 60s CE.⁵

Chapter 1 lays out the socio-literary method and distinguishes the project from studies that are social-scientific, meaning they draw upon sociological and anthropological models of honor and shame that are based on studies of modern societies or cultures. This chapter also introduces the state of the question regarding honor and shame in Markan scholarship: does Mark emphasize Jesus's honor or his (shameful) suffering, and does it draw upon or subvert cultural notions of honor in so doing? In order to answer this question, I establish Mark's general setting (chapter 2) and a conceptual framework for honor and shame (chapter 3). I adopt Barton's definition of Roman honor as a confluence of one's reputation, character, and sensitivity to shame, publicly assessed.⁶

⁴ J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Carlin A. Barton, "Being in the Eyes: Shame and Sight in Ancient Rome," in *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power and the Body*, ed. David Frederick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 216–35; Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁵ The dates for the life of Petronius, the author of the *Satyricon*, are uncertain, although he was probably connected with Nero's court. This connection is held based on the manuscripts of the *Satyricon* along with Tacitus's *Annals*. Some *Satyricon* manuscripts have the name "Petronius Arbiter" rather than simply "Petronius" on them. As for Tacitus, he speaks of one Petronius who became Nero's judge, or arbiter, of taste (*Annals* 16.18). Tacitus asserts that Petronius had been proficient as governor of Bithynia then as consul, but before and after these appointments he was reputed for laziness à la educated luxury. The use of "judge" for each Petronius suggests that they are the same man. Plus, Tacitus seems to describe someone who could have written the lewd and lighthearted *Satyricon*. That the *Satyricon* was written in the 60s CE, when Petronius would have been part of Nero's court, is supported also by the language, geography, and cultural references in the work. Sarah Ruden, "Commentary 1: Who Was Petronius Anyway?," in *Satyricon*, by Petronius, trans. Sarah Ruden (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 129–30.

⁶ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 57.

Shame, on the other hand, has a positive connotation of boundary maintenance and a negative connotation (the connotation in focus here) of degrading loss of honor.

Chapters 4–7 analyze the Gospel of Mark itself in light of this conceptual framework for honor and shame. Chapter 4 explores the establishment and growth of Jesus’s honor on the story and discourse levels of Mark 1:1–8:26, noting Jesus’s growing honor in public and private settings, the mounting opposition that attempts to undercut but actually boosts Jesus’s honor, and the role of the so-called messianic secret in demonstrating his virtuous modesty. Chapter 5 discusses the continued momentum of Jesus’s honor in Mark 8:27–14:31 alongside anticipation of a change of fortunes for him. I draw parallels with the ancient Greek novels in order to show that Mark uses prophecy to create suspense about a looming loss of honor for Jesus. Chapter 6 examines the realization of such a loss of honor in the spiraling shame Jesus experiences during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion in Mark 14:32–15:37, when he is rejected and abandoned seemingly even by God. Lastly, chapter 7 analyzes the final few scenes of the Gospel, from the moment of Jesus’s death through his resurrection. It is focused on the selectively resurgent divine and human affirmation of Jesus, which restores Jesus’s honor for the narrative audience and partially rebuilds his reputation among characters in the story. In all, I conclude that, after firmly establishing Jesus’s honor, the Gospel highlights Jesus’s suffering and loss of public status during Mark 14–15 in order to differentiate between popularity and fame on the one hand and virtue on the other. Ultimately, Mark promotes Jesus as an honorable, approved agent of God who merits following regardless of the conclusions of human courts of opinion, though characters from all sorts of groups (e.g., disciples, Jewish leaders, Roman agents) do recognize Jesus’s honor even after his horrific crucifixion.

This project emphasizes the multivalent relationship between early Christian works and culture, pushing back against a current trend in some scholarly circles to read such works as simply countercultural. Rather than obfuscating the fact, the Gospel of Mark leans into the notion that its

founder and exemplar was rejected, humiliated, and seemingly reduced to nothing. Inasmuch as Mark features Jesus's shameful death as negative, it draws upon cultural notions of honor. Inasmuch as the Gospel reverses the impact of Jesus's crucifixion from shame-inducing to honor-building, it opposes certain contemporaneous notions of honor but aligns with others (such as Stoics who redefined behaviors predominantly viewed as shameful, making them honorable). The Gospel *also* insists that Jesus was a man of status and virtue who deserved and rightly had great reputation for most of his public life. In so doing, it again draws heavily on cultural notions of honor. Overall, the role of honor and shame in the Gospel of Mark is a reminder that religious groups determine their values in dialogue with the cultures that surround them.

CHAPTER 1

METHOD AND SCHOLARSHIP

Before embarking upon an analysis of Mark, it is necessary first to lay the groundwork for such analysis. In this chapter I begin that task by establishing my method and situating my work within New Testament—and especially Markan—studies related to honor and shame. In so doing, I distinguish my socio-literary method from studies that rely upon social-scientific models of honor and shame. Additionally, I highlight four authors with whose work I am in dialogue at key points in this project: Raquel A. St. Clair, David F. Watson, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, and Adam Winn.

A Socio-Literary Approach

The approach I adopt in this project is what I refer to as *socio-literary*. That is, I combine social criticism and literary criticism as I consider both the Gospel of Mark as a narrative and how the social, cultural, and political context of the first-century CE Roman Empire affects the telling of that narrative. More specifically, I investigate how, throughout Mark, Jesus is portrayed as gaining and losing honor. Thus, my question is fundamentally literary, and I consider literary conventions of the early Common Era, especially the first century, as I attempt to answer it. I also employ social criticism, however, as I specifically examine first-century notions of honor and shame. Such investigation allows me to take into account how Mark's author draws upon and shapes cultural notions of honor and how Mark's earliest audiences might have interpreted the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus's honor.

Literary criticism can function as an umbrella approach that includes sub-approaches such as reader-response criticism, deconstructionist criticism, and narrative criticism. My literary approach aligns most closely with the narrative-critical sub-approach, although certain features of other sub-approaches are useful at times in this project. For instance, deconstructionist criticism's emphasis on textual indeterminacy reminds interpreters to allow room for ambiguities and uncertainties in interpretation. In focusing mainly on narrative criticism, I am especially concerned with the approach's major emphases. Those emphases include attention to the text itself in its final form, as a unified whole, and as a communicative product between an author and an audience.¹

Narrative criticism, unlike many iterations of historical criticism, does not focus on how biblical texts developed over time. Thus, rather than primarily asking questions about the text's history of development, I consider the text of Mark as reconstructed by modern scholars. I also explore the possibilities for meaning within the Markan narrative by paying attention to how the story unfolds from start to finish, although I am especially concerned with how the events of the story from the scene in which Jesus is arrested (14:32–52) forward affect the impact of the larger narrative. I assume that, on the whole, the details of the Gospel of Mark work together to tell a story woven with purpose by an author. This assumption does not require making any specific claim about the identity of Mark's author, to whom I refer as "Mark" for convenience.² Instead, it allows me to prioritize the text as a communicative message. That is, I am more concerned with meaning

¹ For a succinct overview of the major principles of narrative criticism, including these emphases, consult Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), esp. 7–9.

I recognize that the label *final form* is an oversimplification of sorts. As scholars, we work with critical editions of the text that seek to reconstruct the earliest recoverable version of the text composed by the author of Mark. This "earliest recoverable version" is distinct from: (1) any traditions, oral or written, used by the author of Mark in composing the Gospel and (2) any editions or additions (including Mark 16:8b–20) that, as best we can tell, were made after the Gospel's author wrote the work.

² Narrative critics often make reference to an "implied author" rather than an actual author. The implied author is found by examining the text, not external information. Powell explains that, for study of the NT Gospels, a significant payoff of the implied author concept is that it becomes possible to understand a literary work even if the author is not known and/or is not a single person (*Narrative Criticism*, 5–6).

found in the text than with meaning found through reconstruction of the author or audience's particular situation.

Despite not making any specific claims about the identity of the author of the Gospel, I am concerned with such an author's context. Literary criticism generally resists the notion that understanding a text is predicated on knowing the author's identity and intentions.³ This resistance is particularly useful in Gospel study, since it cannot be said with any confidence exactly who wrote the Gospels. Nonetheless, no literary text is produced in a cultural or political vacuum, which means that narrative critics should not ignore the literary conventions of a text's historical context or other socio-cultural factors that may be referenced directly or indirectly in a text.⁴ For instance, I agree with Mary Ann Tolbert, who, in her literary interpretation of the Gospel of Mark, considers the major narrative features (including internal emphases and patterns) of the Gospel in the context of other Hellenistic literature. As she asserts, "Writing, like any form of communication, is a deeply social activity, and exploring the matrix of ideas, conventions, social, educational, and political dynamics in which every text is rooted is also part of employing a literary perspective."⁵

Although literary criticism can take into consideration the context of a text's production, such an endeavor can become more robust when one also adopts social criticism. The umbrella approach of social criticism is variously called social, sociological, socio-historical, socio-cultural, and social-scientific criticism. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably without much clarification of their specific nuances. Indeed, the specific nuances and approaches that fall under the

³ Consult W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468–88.

⁴ Although literary criticism (including narrative criticism), can be carried out without any recourse to the text's original context or that of its author, a *focus* on the text is frequently a matter of emphasis rather than an effort to completely ignore original context. On this point, cf. Cleanth Brooks, "In Search of the New Criticism," *The American Scholar* 53 (1984): 41–53.

⁵ Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 33, cf. 12.

umbrella of social criticism can be somewhat overlapping, and what should be entailed in the social approach is often debated.

Tolbert, in “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods,” clarifies the terms *social*, *sociological*, and *cultural/ social-anthropological* as these terms relate to interpretive approaches to the NT. *Social* refers generally to what is labeled by some as proto-sociology, and it generally entails either social description or social history. Social description itself can have a range of meanings and can be as simple as acknowledging the social element of a text.⁶ As David Rhoads explains, however, with regard to study of the NT, social description tends to refer to the study of all known and relevant material evidence from antiquity to reconstruct the daily cultural life of people in first-century CE Roman Empire. Social history is the examination of social description over time. Two other categories that can be grouped under social criticism are sociology of knowledge and identification of social location. Sociology of knowledge builds upon social description to reconstruct what would have been common knowledge(s) or the worldview(s) of a group or society. Identification of social location includes that of the early audiences of the NT texts/early Christians in general, of the authors of the biblical texts, or of the present-day reader of the text.⁷ Specific aspects of these various categories within the social approach apply to my work, including consideration of cultural life and common knowledge during the early centuries of the Roman Empire, as well as the general social location of Mark’s author and Mark’s early audiences. Thus, I adopt the general label *social*, which gets shortened to *socio-* when combined with the term *literary*, to describe my work.

Tolbert distinguishes social study of the NT from sociological/anthropological study of the NT by the explicit use of models based on study of modern groups in the latter. Sociology and

⁶ Mary Ann Tolbert, “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods,” in *Searching the Scriptures: Volume One: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 255–71.

⁷ David Rhoads, “Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries,” in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 145–79, esp. 146–52.

anthropology are often difficult to distinguish (especially by those not trained in the fields), as both can be connected back to sociologist Émile Durkheim. The methods of these social-scientific fields are similar but distinct. Sociology is the study of industrial or post-industrial modern societies. Its goal is the prediction of social behaviors; its methods are mostly quantitative and entail posing, testing, and revising a theory. Social and cultural anthropology is generally more cross-cultural or comparative in nature. Its goal is a detailed description of a single society, comparison of several societies, the study of general human behavior, or the explication of certain cultures and behaviors for the sake of the West. Anthropology entails extensive field work and documentation of study over time.⁸ Often, NT scholars have adopted and adapted models from the social sciences and applied them to NT texts. In these instances, the models developed from studies carried out on modern societies are applied to the NT text as a framework for interpreting the dynamics and assumptions found in biblical texts. I provide specific examples of this occurrence in the review of scholarship that follows this section.

One of the major critiques of models that are based upon modern sociological or anthropological studies is that they naively assume great cultural continuity across space or over a long period of time where this has not always been the case. Because there is quite a bit of ancient literary and archaeological evidence available, it is not necessary to rely so heavily on studies of modern societies or groups to offer a basic framework for our understanding of ancient cultures. Consequently, my own approach herein is not based upon specific models from sociological or anthropological study, although I do not claim to depart entirely from any sort of model. Instead of retrojecting models based on modern groups onto the Greco-Roman world, my conceptual framework (or model) for honor and shame is established by scholars of the Greco-Roman world

⁸ Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," 256–57.

and by engagement with ancient evidence, especially literary evidence, such as the writings of Ovid and Horace. I return to the topic of models in my review of Markan scholarship on honor and shame.

The social approach is so relevant to my work because I am concerned with the social concepts of honor and shame in the first-century Greco-Roman world, specifically in Roman culture. The underlying question that drives my investigation is how the social values of honor and shame impact—and are reshaped in—the telling of the Gospel of Mark. My focus is on how the character Jesus experiences honor and shame throughout the course of the story and thus what the Gospel seems to be communicating about Jesus’s honor through such a portrayal of Jesus. Using social criticism to explore the cultural values of honor and shame helps me better understand how Mark’s author may have conceived of these values and how Mark’s first-century audiences may have interpreted such values in the text. Therefore, I apply the social approach as a means to better answer the narrative task as set by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon. Malbon states, “Story is the *what* of a narrative; discourse is the *how*. Story indicates the content of the narrative, including events, characters, and settings, and their interaction as the plot. Discourse indicates the rhetoric of the narrative, how the story is told.”⁹ Malbon frequently speaks of the story-as-discoursed, or *how* the text means.¹⁰ My task is to investigate the contextualized discourse of honor and shame, especially as it pertains to Jesus, throughout Mark’s Gospel.

⁹ Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, 29–57, esp. 32. Malbon is drawing from literary critic Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

¹⁰ Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 32. Malbon attributes the expression “story-as-discoursed” to Chatman.

A Review of Markan Honor and Shame Scholarship

Scholars of the NT have addressed the topic of honor and shame only within the last forty years. For Markan scholars and other NT scholars alike taking up this topic, the earliest NT scholarship devoted to honor and shame would become widely influential over the next few decades, with such influence extending into recent years. Thus, in order to understand how the topic of honor and shame has been treated in Markan scholarship, it is important first to discuss its introduction into NT studies. Additionally, it is necessary to discuss a few non-Markan works upon which certain Markan studies rely. In what follows, I trace a general evolution from scholarship that relies overwhelmingly on social-scientific models for honor and shame toward scholarship that employs a more nuanced approach, engaging ancient evidence much more significantly. I assess honor and shame NT scholarship that relies heavily on social-scientific models and conclude that beginning with first-century Greco-Roman notions of honor provides the best approach for this project. Finally, I focus on the scholarship of four authors, whose works relate to my own project significantly and, in three cases, represent more nuanced approaches to honor and shame.

The Inaugural Work of Bruce J. Malina

Early consideration of honor and shame in the NT can be credited to Bruce J. Malina, who, in his 1981 *New Testament World*, tries to address comprehensively the social world of the NT, featuring an examination of the “pivotal” Mediterranean social values of honor and shame and considering by extension values such as kinship and marriage, individual and group personalities, limited good, and clean and unclean. Considering Mediterranean culture to be overwhelmingly consistent across space and time, Malina develops a model for first-century Mediterranean honor and shame based on cultural-anthropological studies done in twentieth-century Mediterranean

societies.¹¹ He describes honor as both a claim to worth/status—based on a combination of power, sexual status, and religion—and a public acknowledgement of that claim. The claim and affirmation could relate either to *ascribed honor*, given at birth, or *acquired honor*, earned or lost by men in daily interactions with equals.¹²

Introducing his use of cultural-anthropological models, Malina notes the oversimplifications (abstractions) inherent to models but describes a “scientific method” used to reduce superficiality and inaccuracy as much as possible; this method entails the postulation of a model, the testing of that model “against the real world experience it relates to,” and its modification based on the test results.¹³ For Malina, testing the model consists of considering its explanatory power regarding the biblical text.¹⁴ He does not compare the model’s specific details—which are based on twentieth-century groups—to ancient non-biblical evidence. Instead, he stresses that models provide insight into the way of life and thought of a “foreign” culture: that of the groups, present-day and ancient alike, near the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁵ In at least three works to which Malina contributed in the 1990s—“Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts,” co-written with Jerome H. Neyrey; *The Social Science*

¹¹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), esp. 22–23. Malina draws upon John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). This collection consists of studies carried out on six different twentieth-century Mediterranean societies and regards the fundamental importance of honor and shame in Mediterranean culture, broadly speaking. Malina also cites Julian A. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹² Malina, *New Testament World* (1981), 26–32, 45–47. According to Malina’s model, women did not typically compete for honor.

¹³ Malina, *New Testament World* (1981), 17.

¹⁴ On the matter of testing the model against biblical evidence, Malina directs the reader to consider certain questions about Markan passages. E.g., he asks, “Take the parable in Mark 12:1–9: how does it follow honor-shame rules, with increasing outrage and predictable outcome?” (*New Testament World* [1981], 49).

¹⁵ Malina, *New Testament World* (1981), 18. In the third edition, Malina expands and revises his presentation of honor and shame, but only slightly. Among other changes, near the end of the chapter, Malina adds a paragraph discussing the validity of applying a model based on contemporary Mediterranean values to an ancient culture. As in the first edition, Malina points to the model’s application to the text as its verification. Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. rev. and exp. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 52.

Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, co-edited with Richard L. Rohrbaugh; and *Biblical Social Values and their Meaning*, co-edited with John J. Pilch—a very similar approach to presenting first-century Mediterranean honor and shame is taken.¹⁶ These volumes refer only infrequently to works that consider ancient Mediterranean societies; like *New Testament World*, they typically do not engage the ancient non-biblical evidence directly; and they self-admittedly depend on high levels of generalization.

Early Markan Scholarship on Honor and Shame

As the topic of honor and shame was applied to the Gospel of Mark during the 1980s and early 1990s, most scholars based their treatments of it almost exclusively on Malina's model. At times these scholars would draw directly upon the work of cultural anthropologists in their discussions of honor or other concepts, such as secrecy or ritual. Consideration of how these models correlated with evidence from the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world remained absent or minor.

For instance, in a 1987 article, David M. May argues that honor is the connecting thread of the sandwiched accounts of Jesus's conflict with scribes in Mark 3:22–30 and of his relationship with his family in Mark 3:20–21, 31–35. According to May, both stories underscore Jesus's honor, and in both stories Jesus is interacting with groups who are concerned with preserving their own honor.¹⁷ May draws solely upon Malina's model, stating near the outset of the article that “Bruce Malina has

¹⁶ (1) Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,” *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 25–66. (2) Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, eds., *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Cf. the chapter on Mark (171–278) and the section on honor-shame societies (213–14). (3) John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values and their Meaning: A Handbook* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). The revised (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) and third (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016) editions were published under the title *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*.

¹⁷ David M. May, “Mark 3:20–35 from the Perspective of Shame/Honor,” *BTB* 17 (1987): 83–87.

recently illustrated the potential inherent in using a cultural anthropology model of shame and honor for understanding the social world matrix of the first century.”¹⁸

Another scholar who relies solely on Malina’s model in his treatment of honor and shame is Ched Myers. Myers briefly touches on the topic in his 1988 commentary *Binding the Strong Man* as he analyzes the healing stories in Mark 5:21–43 and 7:24–37. In fact, he quotes Malina’s definition of honor and “highly recommend[s]” Malina’s *New Testament World* to the reader.¹⁹ Then, in her 1994 work *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, Hisako Kinukawa cites both Myers (*Binding the Strong Man*) and Malina (*New Testament World*) as she sets out “to critically study androcentrically-biased texts in the patriarchal society of first-century Palestine,” which she affirms with Myers and Malina to be an “honor culture.”²⁰ Additionally, Kinukawa argues that honor culture is predominant today not only among indigenous groups but also in certain modernized cultures, including Japan. She analyzes Japanese patriarchy by “applying Malina’s anthropological structural analysis.”²¹ While she adjusts the model to account for distinct features of Japan’s culture, she does not make any adjustments to the model in its portrayal of first-century honor and shame.

Still other scholars relied wholly on Malina and his model during this time. Inasmuch as he discusses honor and shame in his 1994 article “Reading Mark Ritually: Honor-Shame and the Ritual of Baptism,” Mark McVann draws from Malina and Neyrey’s description in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*.²² Even as late as 2000, Joseph Hellerman deploys Malina’s model in “Challenging the Authority

¹⁸ May, “Mark 3:20–35,” 84.

¹⁹ Myers employs a socio-literary method, reading Mark “as an ideological narrative, the manifesto of an early Christian discipleship community in its war of myths with the dominant social order and its political adversaries” (*Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988], esp. 31). For his treatment of the passages in question, consult 197–205.

²⁰ Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 11–15, esp. 11.

²¹ Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark*, 15–22, esp. 16.

of Jesus: Mark 11:27–33 and Mediterranean Notions of Honor and Shame.” Hellerman initially, if briefly, discusses patronage as a source of honor in the Roman Empire, drawing upon classicists in so doing.²³ As the article progresses, however, Hellerman applies the Malina-Neyrey model of honor and shame from *The Social World of Luke-Acts* to Mark 11:27–33 without any adaptation.²⁴

Another scholar, John J. Pilch, draws directly upon social anthropologist Julian A. Pitt-Rivers for his presentation of Mediterranean honor. In two very similar articles published in 1992 and 1994, Pilch explores the so-called messianic secret in terms of honor, arguing that Jesus’s secret behaviors in the Gospel serve the purpose of protecting and, at times, increasing his honor.²⁵ Although Pilch draws on Pitt-Rivers’s work in both articles, in the 1994 article, he also utilizes Malina’s definition of honor.²⁶ In neither case does Pilch attempt to adjust the anthropologically based model he employs.

²² Mark McVann, “Reading Mark Ritually: Honor-Shame and the Ritual of Baptism,” *Semeia* 67 (1994): 179–98. McVann reads Mark as a baptismal initiation book, drawing upon the work of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner to describe a three-step process for ritual (*The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967]).

²³ Joseph H. Hellerman, “Challenging the Authority of Jesus: Mark 11:27–33 and Mediterranean Notions of Honor and Shame,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 213–28, esp. 216. Regarding patronage, Hellerman cites Richard Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); John Nicols, “Pliny and the Patronage of Communities,” *Hermes* 108 (1980): 365–85. One of the only ancient sources Hellerman cites regarding honor is Pliny the Younger (*Ep* 1.8), whom he cites to demonstrate that hoarding one’s wealth was dishonorable. Although Pliny does not directly discuss honor, his indication that enslavement to greed was a natural inclination of humans rather than a liberal inclination *might* be read in terms of honor and shame.

Throughout this project, except where noted otherwise, citations of ancient non-biblical literature correspond to the LCL editions of these works, and quotation of or references to Latin or Greek terms are also based on the LCL editions. Where I quote an English translation, I indicate the translator.

²⁴ He does *make reference to* other presentations of the honor and shame model beyond *The Social World of Luke-Acts*. For instance, he cites Halvor Moxnes, “Honor and Shame,” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 19–40.

²⁵ John J. Pilch, “Secrecy in the Gospel of Mark,” *PACE: Professional Approaches for Christian Educators* 21 (1992): 150–53; Pilch, “Secrecy in the Mediterranean World: An Anthropological Perspective,” *BTB* 24 (1994): 151–57. On honor: Julian A. Pitt-Rivers, *People of the Sierra*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). David Watson critiques Pilch’s explanation of the secrecy motif as insufficient, noting that Pilch “offers no substantial analysis of Jesus’ open performance of miracles. Nor does he deal sufficiently with passages such as [Mark] 5:19, in which Jesus himself seems anything but secretive in his behavior” (*Honor among Christians*, 29).

²⁶ Pilch cites Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993).

Markan Scholarship Develops: Employing a More Varied Approach

By the mid-to-late 1990s, scholars writing on Markan honor and shame began employing a more nuanced approach. Although these scholars were often still drawing upon the Malina model and cultural anthropology, they were also engaging the work of classicists or noting ancient literary evidence. Some scholars writing on Mark also drew upon non-Markan NT scholars whose work engaged ancient evidence rather than exclusively drawing upon Malina's presentation of honor or upon modern anthropological studies. This stage of scholarship saw Markan scholars attempting to verify the models they were using, although the evidence they cited did not lead to any adjustment of such models.

In a 1995 article focused on Jesus's death in Mark, Pilch argues that Jesus's style of death demonstrates his honor. Although he notes the importance of ancient (non-biblical) literary evidence for understanding why Jesus's death is honorable in Mark, Pilch directly engages such ancient evidence only briefly.²⁷ Instead, his description of honor and shame draws upon his volume *Biblical Social Values and their Meaning*, co-edited with Malina, and upon the work of cultural anthropologist David Gilmore.²⁸ Nonetheless, Pilch also utilizes the work of David A. deSilva, who himself analyzes the treatment of Jesus's crucifixion in Hebrews by working with ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish literary sources to define honor and shame, not by primarily depending on an anthropological model.²⁹ Thus, by drawing upon deSilva, here Pilch engages ancient evidence more than in the past, if indirectly.

²⁷ John J. Pilch, "Death with Honor: The Mediterranean Style Death of Jesus in Mark," *BTB* 25 (1995): 65–70. E.g., he cites Valerius Maximus (2.7.12) on the shamefulness of crucifixion and Cicero (*Rab. Perd.* 9–17) on the shamefulness of a public trial.

²⁸ David D. Gilmore, *Aggression and Community: Paradoxes of Andalusian Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

²⁹ Pilch, "Death with Honor," 68. Cf. David A. deSilva, "Despising Shame: A Cultural-Anthropological Investigation of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JBL* 113 (1994): 439–61.

Dietmar Neufeld's 2000 article "Jesus' Eating Transgressions and Social Impropriety in the Gospel of Mark" takes a similar approach to that of Pilch's 1995 article. Neufeld argues that in Mark food and eating are used to debate important group-boundary issues and ethical codes of life; "Mark recorded a subversion of the code whereby honor was attached to upholding new regulations of purity and holiness, of communal identity and gender, and of what counted as honorable in the kingdom of God."³⁰ Although, with respect to honor and shame, Neufeld himself does not substantially engage ancient sources and cites several secondary sources that also fail to do so, he does cite a few studies that consider the ancient evidence in more detail. For instance, he utilizes Malina's *New Testament World* and Neyrey's *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, but he also draws upon Neyrey's 1998 work *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*.³¹ With this last source, Neufeld is on steadier ground, since in *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, Neyrey relies not only on cultural anthropology but also on ancient literary evidence (especially rhetorical handbooks such as those from Aelius Theon, Menander, and Hermogenes).³²

In contrast to his earlier article, Neufeld's 2008 essay "Sins and Forgiveness" includes direct engagement with ancient sources on honor. In this analysis of Mark 2:1–12, Neufeld argues that the

³⁰ Dietmar Neufeld, "Jesus' Eating Transgressions and Social Impropriety in the Gospel of Mark: A Social Scientific Approach," *BTB* 30 (2000): 15–26, esp. 25.

³¹ Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). In addition to Neyrey's *Gospel of Matthew*, Neufeld cites Moxnes, "Honor and Shame." In a similar manner to Neyrey, Moxnes draws heavily on cultural anthropology, but he shows sensitivity to the need to demonstrate "cultural consistency within the region over centuries." He continues, "This working hypothesis has been supported by historical and classical studies in which the honor and shame paradigm has proved fruitful." Moxnes then draws upon secondary literature to discuss briefly honor in the Greek world and in the Roman world ("Honor and Shame," 34–36). Other secondary literature Neufeld cites that does not provide ancient evidence includes: Malina and Rohrbaugh, eds., *Social Science Commentary*; Pilch and Malina, eds., *Biblical Social Values* (1993).

³² Neyrey defends the use of cultural-anthropological models as a source of information regarding honor and shame because "the body of information provided by our native informants [ancient evidence] is radically limited"—the models fill in the gaps in information. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that ancient rhetorical theory offers advantages to the present-day interpreter, including "historical primacy as a collection of voices from the very time and culture of Matthew's Gospel" and particular information about the "cultural scene" often absent in models (*Gospel of Matthew*, 7–8).

terms *ἁμαρτία* and *ἀφίημι* should be read in light of ancient honor and shame values; thus, the impact of Jesus's statement to the man with paralysis is, "Son, you are released from the bondage of your paralysis and free to go home."³³ Key for Neufeld is the idea that Mediterranean sons brought honor to their families in part by being contributing family members. To fail in this regard brought shame on the family.³⁴ Thus, Jesus acts as God's powerful broker to release the man from affliction and stigma, reinstating his honor and allowing him to return to his family.³⁵ Where Neufeld discusses honor, he draws on a combination of ancient and modern sources. For instance, in establishing the central importance of honor for Greeks, Romans, and Judeans, he cites Xenophon, Aristotle, Philo, and Josephus.³⁶ The secondary literature Neufeld cites includes works that do not reach back to the first-century evidence (e.g., Malina, *New Testament World*) as well as works that do (e.g., Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*).³⁷

In a similar vein to *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* is Neyrey's 1998 article focused on Mark, "Questions, *Chreiai*, and Challenges to Honor." That is, Neyrey treats honor and shame by drawing on the work of cultural anthropology while also attending to ancient verification of the concepts employed. Neyrey argues that Mark portrays Jesus as victorious in several honor challenges

³³ Dietmar Neufeld, "Sins and Forgiveness: Release and Status Reinstatement of the Paralytic in Mark 2:1–12," in *The Social Sciences and Biblical Translation*, ed. Dietmar Neufeld, SBLSymS 41 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 51–64, esp. 64.

³⁴ But here Neufeld is dependent on Maria-Pia Di Bella, "Name, Blood, and Miracles: The Claims to Renown in Traditional Sicily," in *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, ed. John G. Peristiany and Julian A. Pitt-Rivers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 153–65. Di Bella's study does not consider ancient Greco-Roman or Jewish culture.

³⁵ Neufeld, "Sins and Forgiveness," 62–64.

³⁶ Xenophon, *Hier.* 7.3; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1; Philo, *Worse* 122. Neufeld also cites Philo, *Abraham* 264, in which Philo speaks about the precariousness of honor. Neufeld offers several citations from Philo and Josephus that include references to various aspects of honor ("Sins and Forgiveness," 56).

³⁷ In a more recent article that engages all four Gospels and is not particularly focused on Mark, Neufeld focuses on honor or shame that could come from adorning oneself—through dress, expression, or movement—in Roman society. So cf. Dietmar Neufeld, "Dressing Down Criminals, Deviants, and Other Undesirables," *HvTSt* 70 (2014): 1–8. In this article, Neufeld not only utilizes some ancient evidence directly, he also engages the works of classicists J. E. Lendon (*Empire of Honor*) and Carlin A. Barton ("Being in the Eyes," 216–35). He adopts a similar approach in *Mockery and Secretism in the Social World of Mark's Gospel*, LNTS 503 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

initiated by provoking questions; these agonistic conversations follow the format of the ancient responsive *chreia*, which Neyrey argues to be parallel in structure to what cultural anthropologists refer to as a challenge and riposte.³⁸ Although Neyrey draws upon both the honor and shame model presented in his volume *The Social World of Luke-Acts* and the works of several cultural anthropologists, he also cites various ancient sources as well as secondary literature focused on aspects of Greco-Roman culture germane to his study.³⁹ Of particular importance among the secondary literature is a study by Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O’Neil on the *chreia* in ancient rhetoric.⁴⁰ In establishing that questions could function agonistically in various settings, Neyrey cites several Greek and Roman sources.⁴¹ As he discusses honor in antiquity, he cites Plato, Xenophon, Plutarch, Philo, and Arrian.⁴² Overall, Neyrey attempts to verify the model he employs with ancient texts. He characterizes his study as another “piece of field work” that is “an important emic or native report about ancient cultural life.”⁴³

In a 2011 essay that predominately explores “the Markan representations of the disciples’ (mis)understanding of Jesus from a community-centered perspective,” Jin-Young Choi considers the relationship between Jesus and his disciples using “the communal code of honor-shame.”⁴⁴ Using

³⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, “Questions, *Chreiai*, and Challenges to Honor: The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark’s Gospel,” *CBQ* 60 (1998): 657–81, esp. 669–70, 679.

³⁹ Among other cultural anthropologists, Neyrey cites Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame*.

⁴⁰ Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O’Neil, *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric: Volume 1: The Progymnasmata*, SBLTT 27, Graeco-Roman Religion Series 9 (Atlanta: SBL, 1986), esp. 30–31.

⁴¹ In forensic rhetoric: Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.6, 9.2.12–16; Cicero, *Lig.* 3.9. In philosophical discourse: Plato, *Resp.* 1.336C; Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argon.* 2.5. In education: Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 82. In entertainment: Plutarch, *Alex.* 64.1–11; *Mor.: Table Talk* 2.1.629–631C; Athenaeus, *Deipn.*; Suetonius, *Tib.* 70.3.

⁴² On the agonistic nature of society in antiquity, Plato, *Leg.* 1.625E–626E. On the pursuit of *philotimia*: Xenophon, *Hier.* 7.3; *Mem.* 3.3.13. On a good speech inciting envy: Plutarch, *Mor.: On Listening to Lectures* 44B; *Mor.: Old Men in Public Affairs* 787D. On honor as a limited good even regarding worship of God: Philo, *Drunkennes* 110. On victorious verbal responses or silence in a challenge: Arrian, *Epict. diss.* 1.86, 2.25.

⁴³ Neyrey, “Questions,” 679.

the relationship between Jesus and God as a model for Jesus's relationship to his disciples, Choi suggests that Jesus provides a new model for kinship—egalitarian belonging—rather than appealing to his own ascribed honor via his divine genealogy (“Son of God”). Here, Choi draws largely upon the work of K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman to discuss vertical kinship and patron-client relationships.⁴⁵ In their *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, Hanson and Oakman draw heavily upon social-science models but also engage ancient non-biblical evidence, though not as much as Neyrey in some of his work and deSilva in his.⁴⁶

Assessing Methods in Markan Scholarship and Beyond

The works discussed in the preceding two sections are divided into two groups, but all share at least one commonality: all appeal to anthropology. In some cases, the authors draw directly on studies carried out by social or cultural anthropologists (and occasionally other social sciences). In other cases, the scholars draw upon models by biblical studies scholars developed using anthropological studies of modern Mediterranean societies. In most of these cases, these authors are drawing upon the work of Malina, whether they utilize (1) *New Testament World*, (2) another work by Malina (sometimes co-edited or co-authored by these scholars themselves), or (3) a study that itself uses Malina's model.

I have treated the studies in two groups, however, because the second group displays greater interest in evidence from the ancient world. In the works discussed in group two, the authors appeal to ancient literary evidence directly. When they rely on secondary sources, they either appeal to the

⁴⁴ Jin-Young Choi, “The Misunderstanding of Jesus’ Disciples in Mark: An Interpretation from a Community-Centered Perspective,” in *Mark, Texts @ Contexts*, ed. Nicole Wilkinson Duran, Teresa Okure, and Daniel Patte (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 55–70, esp. 56, 59.

⁴⁵ Choi, “Misunderstanding,” 60–61.

⁴⁶ K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). Although a second edition had been released in 2008, Choi cites the first edition.

work of classicists or they draw upon newer NT studies that engage ancient evidence more extensively.

I have drawn approximate chronological boundaries around the two groups, but Hellerman's 2000 article "Challenging the Authority of Jesus" underscores that the boundaries are, indeed, loose. Hellerman's article is not a lone exception. For example, in a 2011 essay on John the Baptist and Jesus in Mark, Menghun Goh examines the strategic honor given to John the Baptist throughout the Gospel, which in turn reflects upon the honor of Jesus. Goh primarily relies upon Malina's work in laying out a framework for honor and shame.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, there is a discernible shift that happens in the 1990s not only in Markan scholarship but also in NT scholarship generally (recall Neyrey's work on Matthew and deSilva's work on Hebrews): a general trend in the direction of considering ancient literary evidence more directly and extensively. At the same time, the reach of Malina's work even into the present decade is undeniable.

In what follows, I offer an assessment of honor and shame scholarship as presented so far, focusing especially on Malina's work and on how Markan studies have been carried out, but also considering those non-Markan studies that have been especially influential for some Markan scholars. I am less concerned with individual arguments than with approaches taken and implications of those approaches. Additionally, I am pausing to provide this assessment before presenting a few recent Markan studies on honor and shame because, as I explain more in the next section, most of those studies are in certain ways qualitatively different, and they all relate to my own analysis more thoroughly.

⁴⁷ Menghun Goh, "The Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus in the Gospel of Mark: A Postcolonial Interpretation from a Chinese Malaysian Context," in Duran, Okure, and Patte, *Mark*, 171–95.

Insights for Study

In general, efforts to analyze the social aspects of texts, such as honor and shame, are commendable. Fundamentally, they acknowledge the social-situatedness of texts. As a number of scholars now readily acknowledge, texts are social products. They are not created in a vacuum, and they do not communicate without being influenced by culture—or without influencing it, given they are accessed by anyone at all. This notion that texts are social is especially important given the history of reading biblical texts as if they are only spiritual/religious, which is often paired with the unhelpful assumption that religion can be easily separated from other aspects of social life.

Efforts to analyze the social aspects of texts also importantly highlight the social-situatedness of readers/audiences. They bring to light cultural assumptions that can affect the way present-day readers engage texts. To an extent, it is by acknowledging our own social-situatedness that we become alert to values and cultural concepts that impacted ancient texts, especially when those values and concepts are foreign to us. Although I believe wholeheartedly that the “original” or “ancient” meanings of the biblical texts are not the only meanings that matter (nor can they be known with certainty, nor were they singular anyhow), understanding the social aspects of these texts can help illuminate what ancient authors may have been attempting to communicate or what ancient audiences may have been likely to take away from texts.

Scholarship addressing honor and shame has brought insight into a specific aspect of the ancient Greco-Roman world that shapes NT texts, including Mark. Malina and others refer to honor and shame as pivotal values of the ancient world, and while this claim is critiqued at times for being overstated, study of ancient evidence reveals honor and shame to have been important, if variously defined, concepts (so consult chapter 3).⁴⁸ Considering honor and shame offers additional angles

⁴⁸ For a critique of honor and shame as pivotal values, consult F. Gerald Downing, “Honor’ among Exegetes,” *CBQ* 61 (1999): 53–73, esp. 55.

from which to approach NT texts and may, at times, help interpreters understand puzzling features of texts. An example of this latter benefit can be found in Watson's analysis of the so-called Markan messianic secret, to be discussed later in this chapter.

It is precisely because of the benefits of social analysis generally and honor and shame specifically that Malina's work is to be commended for inaugurating a new phase in NT scholarship. Of course, Malina was not the first to bring social questions to the process of interpreting NT texts. Movements such as the history of religion school and the Chicago School attempted to do this in the early twentieth century.⁴⁹ Further, as Jonathan Z. Smith outlines in a 1975 article, various efforts to provide a social description of early Christianity can be documented throughout the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁰ Malina was very influential, however, in bringing the social *sciences*, especially anthropology, to bear on the interpretation of NT texts; he played a major part in launching the specific study of honor and shame within NT studies; and his work has remained influential for several decades, as I have already noted.⁵¹ Malina has made a noteworthy impact on the field.

Malina's Method of Verification

Although Malina's impact must be acknowledged and his influence respected, it should be reiterated that his method does not stand above critique. In particular, as I have already noted, Malina's model relies on the biblical text alone as its verification. That is, in adopting a schema based on studies done in twentieth-century anthropology, Malina assumes continuity in Mediterranean

⁴⁹ Carolyn Osiek, *What are They Saying about the Social Setting of the New Testament?*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1992), 3–4; Robin Scroggs, "The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament: The Present State of Research," *NTS* 26 (1980): 164–179, esp. 165; Dale B. Martin, "Social-Scientific Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes and Stephen L. McKensie (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 125–41, esp. 126.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Social Description of Early Christianity," *RelSRev* 1 (1975): 19–25.

⁵¹ For an example of earlier, less sustained treatments of honor and shame, consult T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), esp. 319–24. Burkill discusses the messiahship of Jesus in light of concepts such as humiliation, power, and glory.

culture over a two-thousand-year span, and he ensures that the model is accurate only by the explanatory power of the model in analyzing biblical texts. The explanatory power of the model when applied to the biblical texts, however, is only one level of verification, and it does not guarantee successful testing for accuracy.

Robin Scroggs makes this point already in 1980 as he reviews sociological approaches to the NT. He does not reference Malina's work specifically (in fact, Malina's *New Testament World* had not yet been released in 1980), but he discusses studies that have developed models/conclusions about social realities based upon NT texts. As Scroggs explains, in the early twentieth century, Adolf Deissmann argued that the social status of early Christians was very low, drawing conclusions especially from the Synoptics in his use of NT evidence. In the 1960s–70s, a new consensus emerged that found the social status of some early Christians to be much higher than previously thought. This time, priority was given to NT evidence from Acts, with the assumption that Acts is more historically reliable. Scroggs questions the new consensus and the favoring of Acts, if only suggestively, but the crucial point here is articulated in his statement, "This raises the question how the same data can produce such different conclusions."⁵² Scroggs is discussing the social history of Christianity, while Malina's work—inasmuch as it concerns this project—asks about honor and shame values present in the NT texts, but the warning bells rung by Scroggs apply here nonetheless. Malina makes claims about social realities behind the NT texts, and he uses the NT to verify those claims. What happens, then, when a NT passage is found to be in tension with part of the model? In such a case, is the NT countercultural, or is the model incorrect? Is the NT internally diverse in its understanding and application of honor and shame? Using Malina's method, attempting to answer such questions becomes confusing.

⁵² Scroggs, "Sociological Interpretation," 169–71, esp. 170.

While the explanatory power of a model does matter, NT (or HB) texts should not be the only ancient evidence considered when seeking to verify anthropologically based models of honor and shame. That Malina fails to consider ancient non-biblical evidence is troubling especially because he makes claims about social realities in which NT texts were produced and in which early Christians lived. What he does not take into account in assuming that social realities in the Mediterranean have been consistent for nearly two-thousand years are factors such as the cultural impact of Islam and the effects of industrialization, technology, and the Enlightenment.⁵³ Even for those societies that have not been industrialized, it is unreasonable to imagine that they have remained entirely unchanged for millennia. In light of the distinct possibility that the passage of time has brought changes, it is no small matter that we do, indeed, have a considerable amount of evidence available to us that can aid in our understanding of how Greco-Roman honor and shame were conceptualized.

Thus, those scholars who more deeply and directly engage ancient evidence, such as Neyrey (in some of his works) and deSilva, have taken a valuable step forward in their honor and shame scholarship. Further, those scholars who rely on Neyrey or deSilva are on steadier ground than those who simply apply Malina's model wholesale. Nonetheless, with Neyrey's *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, which is relevant here predominantly inasmuch as it is used by scholars writing on Mark, we still find the basic presentation of a model imported from cultural anthropology (the same basic model he presents with Malina in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*), even though he cites ancient evidence. Neyrey does not attempt to adapt the model using the ancient evidence.⁵⁴ This approach

⁵³ Carolyn Osiek has raised such issues in her assessment of NT use of the social sciences. Osiek, "The Social Sciences and the Second Testament: Problems and Challenges," *BTB* 22 (1992): 88–95, esp. 90. She considers the general use of social-scientific models in biblical studies, not Malina's model specifically.

⁵⁴ Cf. Louise Joy Lawrence, *An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew: A Critical Assessment of the Use of the Honour and Shame Model in New Testament Studies*, WUNT 2/165 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 19–21. Lawrence offers this critique as well.

would be acceptable if the Neyrey/Malina model stood up entirely to investigation of ancient evidence; however, other scholars have demonstrated that such is not the case.

For instance, Zeba Crook evaluates Malina's model in his article "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," rehearsing the critiques key voices have launched against Malina, Peristiany, and Pitt-Rivers as well as offering critiques of his own. Importantly, Crook relies on extant ancient evidence to evaluate the model rather than the reverse. Among some of the key critiques Crook offers are the following: (1) this model focuses too much on individuals and not enough on the collective, in particular a public court of reputation; (2) contra Malina, it was quite possible for honor-challenges to occur between people of different social statuses; and (3) contra Malina, women could and did vie for and win public honor.⁵⁵ As several scholars have recognized, therefore, Malina's model does not hold up to an evaluation of ancient evidence, at least not without revision. Consequently, those Markan studies that draw upon Malina's model exclusively or primarily have not adopted the most reliable method for their studies.

Problems with the Use of Models in General

Although engaging ancient evidence is helpful, especially if thoroughly enough to recognize when a model needs revision, NT scholars' adoption of social-scientific models at all brings certain liabilities that must be considered and, where possible, avoided. Some NT scholars are especially wary of the adoption of models for reasons stated in this and the following section. Unfortunately, the studies covered so far in this chapter tend to contain several pitfalls.

Considering NT scholarship and the use of models generally, Tolbert raises concerns about applying models based on sociological and anthropological studies to the NT texts. In particular, she draws attention to the ways that NT texts differ from the sources typically used to develop, revise,

⁵⁵ Zeba A. Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *JBL* 128 (2009): 591–611, esp. 599–609.

and apply sociological and anthropological models. Specifically, the NT texts themselves are fixed and do not allow for critics to ask clarifying questions, they are proselytizing documents and may not reflect the group's actual social realities, and they often represent individual perspectives (that of a single author) rather than revealing information about an entire group. Thus, in applying social-scientific models to NT texts, NT scholars are not truly complying with the methods that make social-scientific studies successful.⁵⁶

Additionally, Tolbert charges that NT scholars applying social-scientific models to the NT invert the typical process: "Rather than making the theory the conjectural topic of investigation and the social data the arena of proof, New Testament explorations have often made the textual data the topic of investigation and the theory or model the vehicle of proof."⁵⁷ This is essentially what Malina has done in his analysis of NT texts, and it is a charge that can be brought against Neyrey as well. Even though Neyrey engages non-biblical evidence in *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, he still allows the model to drive the way to data interpretation rather than the other way around. Tolbert's advice for continued use of models is apt here: "To ensure the best possible fit (or the least distortion) between the material being studied and the sociological or anthropological model adopted, the first step in any analysis ought to be the fullest understanding of the historical material in its own Greco-Roman context."⁵⁸ This is the kind of work carried out by Crook, and it leads to deeper engagement with evidence and, consequently, more fruitful analyses of NT texts.

Tolbert raises two more issues regarding the use of social-scientific models in NT analysis. First, the use of a model can obfuscate an interpreter's concerns, presuppositions, and values by seemingly protecting the interpreter from such subjective concerns. That is, interpreters may think

⁵⁶ Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," 266.

⁵⁷ Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," 266.

⁵⁸ Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," 270.

that, in adopting Malina's model and thus highlighting cultural differences between themselves and a text's context, they eliminate hidden cultural assumptions that would otherwise affect analysis. Tolbert offers a poignant reminder that use of models does not result in interpretative objectivity. Second, Tolbert warns that many models that have been adopted fail to take gender into serious consideration, promoting "the invisibility of women."⁵⁹ Take, for example, Malina's model, which Tolbert does not specifically discuss. Although Malina *does* take gender into consideration, his model application forces him into a paradigm that almost exclusively limits women to the private, passive sphere, although several studies have demonstrated this to be a misleading oversimplification of evidence.⁶⁰

Louise Joy Lawrence addresses similar potential pitfalls with the use of models; her assessment does not apply only to the study of NT texts. She outlines at least four concerns. First, models can lead to determinism and can inhibit openminded consideration of evidence outside a given framework. Second, models make it difficult to ensure that a given study has not been set up to legitimate a model. Third, using models is problematic if a "micro-scale model...[is transposed] onto macro-scale dynamics beyond the model's original context of production."⁶¹ Fourth, a model cannot be assumed correct and should be, at any point, open to rejection or revision based on research results.⁶² Lawrence ultimately affirms the use of models and abstractions in her study on honor and shame in Matthew; however, she, like Tolbert, emphasizes the need to prioritize the evidence and to shape the theory, or model, only in tandem with consideration of the evidence.⁶³

⁵⁹ Tolbert, "Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods," 268–70.

⁶⁰ In addition to Crook, other scholars have critiqued Malina on this point. So cf. F Downing, "'Honor' among Exegetes," 58.

⁶¹ Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 22–23.

⁶² Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 23.

The studies on Mark covered already in this chapter—whether they apply models directly from the social sciences, they rely upon Malina’s model, or they rely upon other scholars who take anthropological studies as their framework—tend to exhibit little nuance in their model application. In particular, there is almost no acknowledgement of the differences between social-scientific model construction and the circumstances of studying the NT. Further, it seems overwhelmingly that these studies have been driven by the model rather than first allowing the ancient evidence to establish a framework for understanding.

Oversimplified Perceptions of Culture and Overgeneralized Notions of Honor

The studies on Mark highlighted above as well as the studies upon which they depend tend to be lacking in nuance with respect to culture generally and to honor and shame specifically. This is especially true because these Markan studies largely rely upon the work of Malina, Neyrey, and in one instance deSilva, who have been critiqued as follows.

Lawrence critiques Malina, Neyrey, and deSilva, among others, for adopting outdated and oversimplified notions of culture, which she contends can be traced back to 1960s anthropology. These authors are guilty of assuming culture to be a static object that can be decoded rather than a dynamic, internally diverse perspective that can be “questioned, challenged, resisted and ‘read’ differently by individuals.”⁶⁴ Further, these biblical studies scholars have portrayed Mediterranean honor and shame—even ancient Mediterranean honor and shame—as a single entity and anything that varies from it as countercultural. Such is one key critique Lawrence launches against deSilva’s work in particular: “Social divides between the dominant society and the marginal group is [*sic*] too

⁶³ Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 37–42. Lawrence describes her particular approach as ethnographic.

⁶⁴ Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 27.

clear-cut in deSilva's evaluations....[S]ocieties cannot neatly be segregated into monolithic entities."⁶⁵ She critiques Neyrey for labeling Matthew as anti- or counter-cultural and Malina for labeling John as such simply because the NT evidence does not fit the model they are using. Lawrence suggests that a more variegated understanding of culture would reveal that such attitudes toward honor and shame as those found in Matthew and John can be corroborated elsewhere in culture and thus represent one of many paradigms for honor present in Greco-Roman culture.⁶⁶

The view of culture that Lawrence critiques is something that anthropologists have critiqued among themselves, and specifically in light of conceptions of honor and shame. For example, Rosemary J. Coombe, in evaluating work done in Mediterranean anthropology, criticizes an oversimplified and static understanding of honor and shame, especially when honor and shame have been treated as if they are the only values of Mediterranean culture. Coombe believes that the more established, traditional tendencies of these societies (as they pertain to honor and shame) should be held in balance with the changing nature of culture. She also submits that the values of honor and shame should be examined closely within specific cultures.⁶⁷ In general, the trend among anthropologists within recent decades has been to nuance treatments of honor and attitudes toward culture in at least three ways: (1) seeking cultural specificity and recognizing tensions within a given culture; (2) situating honor alongside other operable values (e.g., hospitality); and (3) considering the multivalent meaning of honor within and across cultures.⁶⁸ Such developments have not undermined the idea that honor and shame are important, common cultural values among Mediterranean groups,

⁶⁵ Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 15.

⁶⁶ Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 23.

⁶⁷ Rosemary J. Coombe, "Barren Ground: Re-Conceiving Honour and Shame in the Field of Mediterranean Ethnography," *Anthropologica* 32 (1990): 221–38, esp. 234–35.

⁶⁸ So cf. Mark T. Finney's overview in *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in its Greco-Roman Social Setting*, LNTS 460 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 6–7.

but they have led to greater appreciation for the complexity of Mediterranean honor and shame, with respect both to *Mediterranean* and to *honor and shame*.

This forward progress in modern anthropology might make model application in biblical studies more nuanced and might also be a positive example for biblical scholars' perspectives on culture; however, this progress does not mean that culturally nuanced anthropological models of honor and shame map well onto the cultural nuances of the Greco-Roman world. As Mark T. Finney asks in his study on honor and conflict in 1 Corinthians, "If modern ethnographic research now points to the polysemic function of honour, how well do such modern notions comport with ancient texts? In practical terms, for example, how does the function of honour within a homogenous small rural community of modern Greece...parallel the patronally stratified urban society of ancient Rome?"⁶⁹ Markan scholars who engage the topic of honor and shame need to keep in mind nuance with respect to culture in general and honor and shame more specifically, and they should also keep in mind the problems inherent in applying social-scientific models, however nuanced they might be, to ancient texts and contexts.

Takeaways

In general, the Markan works covered already in this chapter tend to apply existing models of honor and shame without demonstrating sufficient sensitivity to the challenges inherent in using models. Further, most rely uncritically on anthropologically based models that oversimplify culture, including attitudes toward honor and shame, and are subject to major anachronisms. The foundational work of Malina, along with the work of Neyrey and deSilva, has helped to establish conversations related to honor and shame in Markan studies but has methodological drawbacks. As such, Markan studies should not rely predominately on the models established by Malina and

⁶⁹ Finney, *Honour and Conflict*, 8.

Neyrey, nor should they uncritically adopt the attitudes toward culture present in the work of Malina, Neyrey, and deSilva. Rather, Markan scholars must be prepared to investigate the specific and varied ways honor functioned in the Greco-Roman world, using extant evidence and taking into account that culture is not simply a monolithic entity.

As I have already mentioned, in her study of Matthew, Lawrence chooses to continue using anthropologically based models and abstractions. With that said, she “modif[ies] their use by giving supreme importance to specific data acquired by empirical research” and thus is willing to “qualify or change generalised theories.”⁷⁰ In his study of 1 Corinthians, Finney finds the use of anthropologically based models too problematic. As such, he views his quest as anthropological in the widest sense, “as a technique for observing social action,” and he labels his project as social history rather than as social science.⁷¹ Although Finney rejects the use of models, he does not claim to be free of any framing paradigm for understanding but recognizes that the primary and secondary sources he consults form his paradigm.⁷² Whether Markan studies are carried out using anthropologically based models or not, care should be taken to consider the ways our frameworks shape our perspectives.

In this study I do not draw upon models based on modern anthropological studies to frame my thinking but primarily develop a framework of understanding utilizing ancient sources and the work of classicists who have themselves addressed Greco-Roman honor and shame. As such, I do not claim to be altogether model-free. Nonetheless, I aim to prioritize the data in shaping my understanding of the complex notions of honor and shame in the first-century Greco-Roman world.

⁷⁰ Lawrence, *Honour, Shame, and Biblical Interpretation*, 5–6, esp. 6.

⁷¹ Finney, *Honour and Conflict*, 11.

⁷² Finney, *Honour and Conflict*, 11–12.

Recent Markan Studies Related to Honor

Although I have paused to offer substantial assessment of the Markan studies already covered in this chapter, I have waited to discuss works by Raquel A. St. Clair, David F. Watson, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, and Adam Winn in part because these more recent studies relate to my own project more extensively and directly. All four of these authors provide extended analysis of Jesus's honor in Mark. Watson, Malbon, and Winn draw attention to Jesus's resistance to honor, and all four argue that the Gospel emphasizes Jesus's honor in some way: for Watson and St. Clair the Gospel promotes Jesus's honor as countercultural, for Winn it promotes Jesus's honor in keeping with cultural sentiments, and for Malbon the narrative has ambivalence regarding Jesus's honor.

With the exception of St. Clair's work, these studies also differ methodologically from those discussed previously. Watson utilizes a social-scientific model while Winn does not, but both thoroughly consider ancient evidence regarding honor and shame. Malbon takes a different approach altogether, analyzing how the narrative offers a complex, mysterious message about Jesus's honor.

Because of their relevance to my argument and, in three cases, because of their methodological distinctiveness from previous studies, I discuss the works of these four authors in greater detail than those Markan studies I have already covered. As needed in the coming chapters, I dialogue with each of these author's arguments, articulating specific points of agreement and disagreement. Here, I lay out general arguments and focus my assessment on method and on the general impact of these arguments for considering Jesus's honor in Mark.

Raquel A. St. Clair's Call and Consequences

Raquel A. St. Clair's 2008 work *Call and Consequences* is "a sociolinguistic reading of Mark 8:31–38 through a womanist cultural lens, a lens that corresponds to ancient Mediterranean

honor/shame codes.”⁷³ St. Clair argues that the pain of the cross foretold in Mark 8:31–38 is a consequence of Jesus’s ministry. Rather than itself being Jesus’s call, this pain arises from the opposition of those threatened by his honor and who seek to shame and discredit him. Ultimately, however, it is the religious leaders’ actions that are shameful, since Jesus’s ministry represents the will of God and since Jesus receives true honor from God.⁷⁴

Relatedly, St. Clair argues that the pain the disciples will undergo in following Jesus is not part of their call to share in Jesus’s ministry but is a consequence of their call, since the world will also mistreat them. Jesus calls his disciples to relinquish their cultural identities and associate with him, accepting the societal consequences of dishonor and possibly even death in so doing. St. Clair understands this call to entail a reversal of “the would-be disciples’ traditional concepts of honor and shame”: “the call to follow Jesus is a call to reorient their perspective and affirm Jesus’ honor system. Rather than seeking the honor that the religious rulers and other elite member of society have the power and authority to ascribe, they must seek the only true honor—that which God bestows through Jesus.”⁷⁵ As such, God becomes the ultimate court of public reputation for honor. Because any who accept this reversed system of honor and shame that Jesus offers will be vindicated by God, Jesus’s call to the disciples entails sharing in Jesus’s shame (from the world) but also his honor (from God). Those who reject Jesus, “succumb to the honor standards of the world,” and “striv[e] for the honor of humans” are ultimately dishonorable in God’s perspective.⁷⁶

St. Clair’s treatment of honor and shame draws heavily on Malina. She frequently cites his *New Testament World* as well as his coedited volumes with Rohrbaugh (*The Social Science Commentary on*

⁷³ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 110.

⁷⁴ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 111–27.

⁷⁵ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 139.

⁷⁶ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 139–40.

the Synoptic Gospels) and Pilch (*Biblical Social Values and their Meaning*). Additionally, she draws some on David deSilva's *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, which engages ancient non-biblical evidence with regard to honor and shame only to a limited degree.⁷⁷ St. Clair does not herself directly engage ancient literary or epigraphic evidence in her study. As such, her work is much like the Markan studies discussed earlier in this chapter, and in this regard it is subject the same critiques as they are. For instance, St. Clair's presentation of first-century Mediterranean culture and notions of honor is a bit oversimplified. Her language of "the honor standards of the world" is suggestive of a singular and uniform system of honor in the first-century Mediterranean world. By contrasting "the honor of humans" with true honor, which comes from God, she suggests, even if unintentionally, that God offers one kind of honor while humans offer another kind. I return to this issue in chapter 5.

Despite the methodological limitations of St. Clair's work vis-à-vis honor and shame, I include her work in this section because of her important argument about the rhetorical force of Jesus's statements regarding followership—that is, they motivate followers in the narrative and its audience to remain faithful to Jesus amidst his shame and theirs. St. Clair suggests that Jesus's statements have such an effect because he reminds his followers of the eventual vindication of his and their honor. When I take up St. Clair's argument in chapter 5, I consider how the rhetorical impact of Jesus's follower statements affects the experience of his shame by the narrative audience.

David F. Watson's Honor Among Christians

In his *Honor among Christians*, David Watson interprets Mark's so-called messianic secret using the cultural lens of honor, although in much greater detail than did Pilch.⁷⁸ Watson argues that

⁷⁷ David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000). DeSilva does make reference to his work *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 152 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995]), in which he cites several Jewish, Greek, and Latin authors.

⁷⁸ I noted Watson's criticism of Pilch above. Consult n25.

Mark's concealment passages are better understood as a countercultural approach to Mediterranean honor and shame than as a secrecy motif.⁷⁹ That is, Mark's concealment passages reveal that at times Jesus is resisting achieved honor and downplaying ascribed honor in order to "engag[e] in a kind of ethical revisionism."⁸⁰ In particular, Watson argues that the main import of Mark 8:27–9:1 is its function as a call by Jesus for his disciples to accept a new system of honor and shame that stands in opposition to that of the world.⁸¹ Then in 9:9–13 Jesus preemptively gives a "new honor value" to his crucifixion-death.⁸²

Acknowledging that in several Markan passages Jesus does not conceal his honor, Watson argues that the inconsistency can be explained by other themes that were of interest to Mark.⁸³ He also suggests that the inconsistency in the narrative is part of a "rhetoric of indirection," which causes an audience to be puzzled over a (here, culturally unexpected) behavior or event but which also works together with passages that meet reader's expectations to help them make sense of parts that do not meet expectations. Watson utilizes Robert Fowler's reader-response theory for his rhetoric of indirection; however, drawing parallels between *Life of Aesop* and Mark, Watson uses the former to provide support for the claim that indirection and inconsistency were utilized in contemporaneous literature.⁸⁴ In his conclusion Watson posits that the ancient audience(s) of Mark

⁷⁹ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 20–30, 38. Not only does Watson observe that secrecy vocabulary itself is scarce in Mark, he also finds that the typical functions of secrecy in the ancient Mediterranean world do not seem to explain those features of Mark which constitute the so-called messianic secret.

⁸⁰ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 40. Cf. 39.

⁸¹ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 72.

⁸² Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 75; cf. 76–83. Despite Jesus's reconfiguring of the coming crucifixion, the disciples repeatedly fail to understand and accept what Jesus is teaching them. Surprisingly, it is Bartimaeus (a man who is blind and then healed by Jesus) who seems to understand and accept the path to which Jesus calls him.

⁸³ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 113.

⁸⁴ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 129–36. Cf. Robert Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996). Fowler considers modern audiences; Watson applies the concept to the ancient audiences of Mark.

was (were) undergoing persecution; Mark, then, deconstructed and reconstructed the cultural concepts of honor and shame to build solidarity and honor in a community that was viewed as shameful and treated with contempt by the larger culture.⁸⁵

In establishing his method, Watson introduces the model of Mediterranean honor and shame that has been developed especially by Malina, Neyrey, Rohrbaugh, and Pilch. Watson emphasizes that the social-scientific approach to interpreting the NT relies on two levels of work: (1) analogy to cultural values in the Mediterranean world today and (2) intense verification and modification based on ancient evidence (the Mediterranean world at the time of the NT).⁸⁶ Watson tends to rely on the Malina model for broad strokes, sometimes when he ought not. For instance, he adopts Malina and Neyrey's description of women's involvement in the honor system.⁸⁷ For Watson, however, the importance of verification based on ancient evidence is crucial, and this commitment is clear throughout the work. For example, as he establishes the various ways one could gain honor (especially in explaining the etic descriptions "ascribed" and "achieved" honor), he cites Josephus, Philo, and Plutarch.⁸⁸ Watson engages several ancient sources in discussing the importance of benefaction (e.g., Plutarch), and he utilizes Frederick Danker's work in this area as well.⁸⁹ Later, as he discusses the possibility of (attempts at) rejecting the dominant culture's obsession with honor, Watson again cites Diogenes and depends on classicist J. E. Lendon's description of the Cynics'

⁸⁵ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 144–49.

⁸⁶ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 13–14. Watson largely engages literary evidence, although he does reference at least one inscription.

⁸⁷ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 39. Cf. n5, in which he also cites modern anthropological studies.

⁸⁸ For an example of achieved honor: Josephus, *Ant.* 6.80–81. For examples of honor being ascribed: Josephus, *J.W.* 1.199; Philo, *Moses* 2.32.172–173; Plutarch, *Num.* 6.

⁸⁹ E.g., Plutarch, *Alex.* 34.1–4; *Caes.* 5.8–9. Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982).

attitude toward honor.⁹⁰ He also engages *Life of Aesop* to argue that both Mark and *Aesop* subvert dominant cultural values in favor of a less privileged group.⁹¹

With regard to his portrayal of culture, Watson is probably, like St. Clair, subject to the same critique that Lawrence offers against Malina, Neyrey, and deSilva. Specifically, Watson portrays Greco-Roman culture as a largely singular entity against which Christian culture stands in relief. Mark's portrayal of Jesus's honor has a more complex relationship with culture than Watson sometimes allows. This applies not only to larger cultural attitudes toward fame, servitude, and death but also to Jesus's own acceptance of honor. Watson is insightful, however, to link Jesus's so-called secretive behavior with issues of honor, and I return to his argument in chapter 4.

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon on Jesus's Honor in Mark

In her 2009 *Mark's Jesus*, Malbon engages the topic of Jesus's honor in Mark without recourse to ancient evidence but also without use of social-scientific models. Instead, she adopts a narrative approach and analyzes the narrative christology of Mark—she is particularly interested in how the narrative of Mark reveals who Jesus is.⁹² Malbon suggests that, throughout Mark, the character Jesus resists kingship and honor, while the narrator is more willing to embrace Jesus's honor. The implied author intentionally creates this tension between the two, a tension meant to be a mystery rather than to be resolved. As Malbon explains in a 2014 essay on the same topic, “The implied author is the one who allows a character, even the main character, to have a point of view distinct not only from other characters but also from the narrator—and vice versa. A Jesus who

⁹⁰ Diogenes Laertius 6, 72.

⁹¹ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 131. Cf. David F. Watson, “The *Life of Aesop* and the Gospel of Mark: Two Ancient Approaches to Elite Values,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 699–716. Watson characterizes Mark but not *Aesop* as revisionist.

⁹² Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 3–6. Malbon is intentional in not capitalizing *christology* since she does not use the term to refer to a branch of theology.

talks like the narrator could hardly be a Jesus who ‘came not to be served but to serve’ (10.45), but a Jesus who affirms only what the Markan Jesus says could hardly bear the full weight of ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (1.1).”⁹³

In the same 2014 essay, Malbon engages Watson’s interpretation of secrecy as honor resistance in Mark. Both Malbon and Watson hold that Mark’s Jesus is resisting honor, and both observe a tension in Mark’s narrative. Whereas Watson holds that this tension is simply an acceptable inconsistency in the narrative due to first-century oral-aural culture, Malbon describes her own interpretation as more creative. She notes that the hinge for her interpretation is the very thing Watson overlooks: “that the Markan narrative tends to have the Markan Jesus (the character who speaks) make the countercultural moves with regard to honor (‘don’t tell’) and the Markan narrator and other characters make the more traditional ones (‘his fame spread’).”⁹⁴

Malbon’s narrative approach is quite different from the other studies presented in this chapter. Her method is not subject to all the same critiques since she does not adopt a social-scientific model or attempt to establish first-century notions of honor. With that said, it is worthwhile to consider how Malbon’s particular treatment of Jesus’s honor tracks with a contextualized (i.e., first-century) reading of Jesus’s honor. At points throughout this work, I conclude that, in the case of Jesus’s own words and actions, the Gospel features Jesus’s honor more than Malbon contends. Drawing on an argument by Winn (to be discussed in the following section), I also conclude that, when Jesus resists honor, he is often acting within the bounds of first-century Roman notions of honor rather than behaving counterculturally. As such, I would suggest that Malbon’s narrative reading of Jesus’s honor in Mark would benefit from more direct engagement with the Gospel’s cultural context.

⁹³ Malbon, “History, Theology, Story,” 35–56.

⁹⁴ Malbon, “History, Theology, Story,” 47–49, esp. 49.

The Work of Adam Winn

In his 2014 article “Resisting Honor: The Markan Secrecy Motif and Roman Political Ideology,” Adam Winn builds upon and critiques Watson’s argument regarding secrecy and honor in Mark. Winn agrees with Watson’s assessment that the secrecy motif is best understood as Jesus intentionally resisting honor; however, Winn does not believe such resistance is an inversion of honor. Instead, the Markan Jesus’s resistance to honor is consistent with Roman political ideology and must be understood against the specific backdrop of Roman rulers resisting honor.⁹⁵ Winn describes Roman political ideology as follows:

[It] was characterized by an unwavering commitment to self-rule and great disdain for monarchs and tyrants. As a result, this ideology necessitated certain limitations to an individual’s acquisition of public honors, particularly either honors that in some way undermined the republican government (e.g., excessive appointments as consul, abuse of the dictatorship, etc.) or honors that were closely associated with monarchy (e.g., building temples in one’s honor, receiving divine worship, accepting monarchical titles, etc.).⁹⁶

Beginning with Augustus, those who held the principate tended to reject certain public honors that might be perceived as excessive (*recusatio*) to prevent violating Roman sensibilities and appearing arrogant and tyrannical.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 583–601. Like Watson, Winn also critiques Pilch, “Secrecy in the Gospel of Mark,” as well as Malina, *New Testament World* (2001) regarding Jesus’s behavior in Mark. In *New Testament World*, Malina makes an argument similar to Pilch’s. He asserts that Jesus concealed his messianic status as an attempt to ward off envy of others. If he were open about being the messiah, he would be seen as a lowly artisan attempting to grasp for status above his due. In a world that presupposed honor as a limited good, such envy was dangerous (125). Winn (“Resisting Honor,” 589n18–19) rejects both Pilch and Malina’s interpretations because he understands Jesus to be rejecting honor, not concealing it. He avers that Greek and Roman authors do not mention rejection of honor as a strategy of avoiding envy (Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 2.209–11; Plutarch, *Inv. od.* 6, *De laude* 4, 6, 9, 11, 12). In light of the particular Roman audience Winn assumes and the characterization of Jesus Winn sees in Mark, one might also wonder if it makes sense for Mark’s Jesus to be worried about envy. J. E. Lendon has demonstrated that, among Roman aristocrats, honor was not necessarily perceived as a limited good and was relatively stable (“Roman Honor,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 377–403, esp. 389–90). Although Jesus was not an aristocrat, his high status made explicit at the start of the narrative makes this comparison feasible.

⁹⁶ Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 589–90.

⁹⁷ Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 589–93. For more on *recusatio*, cf. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King,” *JRelS* 72 (1982): 32–48, upon which Winn draws.

When the specifically Roman ideological backdrop is considered for Mark's portrayal of Jesus, Winn argues, it becomes clear that Mark is not inverting Greco-Roman honor and shame sentiments but employing the Roman concept of ruler-honor to make a claim about Jesus that challenges Roman imperial propaganda. That is, "In an effort to demonstrate that Jesus is the true 'Son of God' and true ruler of the world, Mark co-opts language, imagery, and other realities from the world of the Roman emperors and incorporates them into this story of Jesus."⁹⁸

Winn primarily references Suetonius and Cassius Dio to underscore the Roman notion of emperors resisting honor.⁹⁹ Although these authors are both writing several decades after Mark, the *Res gestae divi Augusti* offers evidence that the propagandistic behaviors against which Mark seems to be reacting are not retrospectively created by Suetonius and Dio. Winn's argument is in keeping with the description Lendon provides of the tempered resistance some emperors showed toward honors of the imperial cult.¹⁰⁰

Winn's 2014 essay engages Watson's work in detail and is focused only on the first half of Mark's Gospel. Elsewhere, Winn has written about how honor plays out in the entire Gospel of Mark. In *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel* (2008), Winn argues that Mark's Gospel is a response to Roman imperial propaganda that claims the emperor Vespasian as the awaited ruler fulfilling even Jewish prophecy, which creates a Christological crisis among Roman Christians. As such, the entire Markan narrative, from incipit to resurrection, emphasizes Jesus's power and authority as exceeding that of

⁹⁸ Winn, "Resisting Honor," 599.

⁹⁹ As Winn demonstrates, Augustus is presented as behaving in this manner in Suetonius, *Aug.* 52.1–2, 53.1; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 52.35; and Augustus's own *Res gest. divi Aug.* 5.1, 5.3, 4.1, 24.2. Tiberius, Vespasian, and Claudius are portrayed acting similarly in Suetonius, *Tib.* 24.1, 26.1–2; *Vesp.* 12; *Claud.* 12.1; and Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 57.2.1, 57.8.1, 57.9.1, 60.3.2, 60.5.4. Julius Caesar and Gaius Caligula are both criticized (in Suetonius, *Jul.* 76.1; *Cal.* 22.1–3; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 44.4–6) for accepting honors seen as excessive. Winn asserts that the refusal of honors deemed excessive was a particularly Roman behavior that responded to a Roman sentiment; it would not have been necessary in other parts of the empire removed from particularly Roman influences ("Resisting Honor," 589–93).

¹⁰⁰ So cf. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 169–70. Lendon makes the point that "one should not overemphasize imperial reluctance." It is, after all, a propagandistic move to resist some honor.

the Emperor Vespasian. This emphasis holds, according to Winn, throughout the passion narrative, where Jesus's humiliation is deemphasized, and irony is abundant.¹⁰¹

In his 2018 *Reading Mark's Christology under Caesar*, Winn recognizes that his previous emphasis on Jesus's power and authority to the exclusion of suffering and shame was too extreme, and he attempts to avoid such an extreme. He remains convinced, however, that the powerful Jesus is emphasized throughout *all* of Mark. Winn is especially concerned to correct a tendency by narrative and redaction critics to privilege a Christology of suffering (beginning at 8:27) over a Christology of power (1:1–8:26).¹⁰² By *Christology* Winn means “the way that Mark presents the central character of the narrative, Jesus, including the ways the Gospel identifies Jesus, the roles and functions attributed to Jesus, and the ultimate significance given to Jesus as God's agent.”¹⁰³ He believes that Mark “presents a unity rather than a tension between the powerful Jesus, whom God has appointed as his ruler of the world, and the suffering Jesus, who experiences pain, shame, and death.”¹⁰⁴

Winn characterizes Jesus's crucifixion as “a shameful death, to be sure,” but he insists that “this death is not a negation of the powerful Jesus who dominated the first half of Mark's Gospel, a Jesus who is in fact quite present until (and through?) the passion narrative. Rather, this death is the proper outcome for the true ruler of the world. He must embrace this shameful death as an act of service for his people—an act that Mark has used to highlight his greatness rather than to mitigate it.”¹⁰⁵ In particular, Mark has taken the passion narrative—which is a fulfillment of the self-sacrifice

¹⁰¹ Adam Winn, *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, WUNT 2/245 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), esp. 180–94. Adela Yarbro Collins suggests a similar use of irony that communicates true kingship to Christian insiders (“From Noble Death to Crucified Messiah,” *NTS* 40 [1994]: 481–503, esp. 495–96).

¹⁰² Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 20.

¹⁰³ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 1n1.

¹⁰⁴ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 153.

about which Jesus speaks prophetically in 10:42–45—and has depicted it as a Roman triumph which honors Jesus for the benefaction of his self-sacrifice. “Thus the Markan Jesus is ironically honored in a traditional Roman way” and his shameful death “is transformed into a strength.”¹⁰⁶

Winn’s work on honor in *The Purpose of Mark’s Gospel* and *Reading Mark’s Christology under Caesar* is not based on social-scientific models. In *Reading Mark’s Christology under Caesar*, he identifies his method as historical-narrative. Winn focuses on Mark as a unified narrative from start to finish; however, he distinguishes his work from exclusive narrative criticism because he attempts to “read Mark’s narrative from a particular sociocultural and historical setting.”¹⁰⁷ This setting is Rome, shortly after the fall of the second temple in 70 CE, when Vespasian was attempting to solidify his power through propaganda. By attempting to establish and taking into account the sociopolitical situation in which Mark was first written, Winn believes he may help clarify the puzzle that is Mark’s Christology.¹⁰⁸ In fact, at one point in his analysis, Winn avers that narrative-critical methods alone provide “little recourse” for resolving a tension in Mark between Jesus’s power/glory and his suffering; rather, “if one attempts to read Mark’s narrative in light of a reconstructed historical setting, such a reconstruction might provide the necessary pieces(s) of the puzzle to resolve what appears to be unresolvable narrative tension.”¹⁰⁹

In all of these works by Winn, because he does not use a model for honor, he does not make claims about how honor functioned without drawing first from historical analysis. Further, he does not attempt to discuss Greco-Roman honor generally but focuses on honor in first-century Rome, a

¹⁰⁵ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 152.

¹⁰⁶ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 162.

¹⁰⁷ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 22–27. Cf. 29–49 for Winn’s argument regarding Mark’s historical setting.

¹⁰⁹ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 94.

cultural and political context that is influenced by Roman imperial propaganda. Whether Winn successfully argues that Mark was written in Rome for Roman Christians or not, his decision to consider Roman imperial notions of honor allows him to avoid overgeneralizing Greco-Roman culture and establishes a specific context for examination in his ancient sources. He does not merely type Mark as countercultural but seeks to demonstrate the ways in which Mark actually draws a specific cultural phenomenon: propagandistic portrayals of Roman emperor honor.

In terms of his method in *Reading Mark's Christology under Caesar*, I agree with Winn's desire to pair narrative analysis with context, which scholars such as Tolbert have also done. With that said, I take issue with a claim about the relationship between context and literary readings Winn makes in establishing his historical-narrative approach, which is not drastically different from my own. While I agree that knowledge of a text's context can aid in understanding, and I do believe that Winn makes strong arguments relating to the specific sociopolitical context of Mark, I do not agree that it is necessary to be as specific as Winn is in order to make sense of the Markan narrative flow. This is not to say that I do not find Winn's contextualization helpful. Rather, I disagree that the Markan narrative reads as if it has unresolvable tension unless one appeals to a specific historical situation. While I find Winn's contextualization to be plausible, I believe a cohesive narrative analysis can be accomplished with only general recourse to cultural context. In particular, I am interested in considering how Mark might have been interpreted among audiences attuned to Roman notions of honor without claiming Mark was written to address post-70 CE Vespasian prophetic fulfillment propaganda.

Conclusion

In this work, I analyze the Gospel of Mark by paying specific attention to how the Gospel promotes Jesus's honor and features his shame. Although the works of Winn, Malbon, Watson, and

St. Clair are all particularly relevant to my study, I read the Gospel to highlight Jesus's honor in keeping with the surrounding culture more than do St. Clair, Malbon, and Watson. Further, I read the Gospel to highlight Jesus's shame (to the general exclusion of Jesus's honor) during the passion more than does Winn. Nonetheless, my approach is more similar to the methods of Watson, Winn, and Malbon than it is to those Markan studies which rely heavily on social-scientific models of honor and shame with only modest recourse to ancient evidence. Beginning with chapter 4, I embark upon a literary reading of Mark that focuses on how the Gospel employs first-century Roman notions of honor and shame to portray Jesus. Before doing so, in chapter 2 I say more about the context of Mark's production and early reception, and in chapter 3 I discuss the cultural values of honor and shame in Mark's context.

CHAPTER 2

ESTABLISHING MARK'S CONTEXT

Many scholarly analyses of Mark hinge upon positing a relatively precise date for Mark's composition, a specific audience for whom Mark was written, or both. In contrast, my analysis does not depend upon identifying these details with such specificity. In this chapter, while I present the major arguments related to Mark's date and audience, I conclude that far more important than defining the particular city or region in which the Gospel was written, the group for which it was written, or its exact date of composition is understanding its broader context of Roman imperialism.

Mark's Date

Mark was written during the first century CE somewhere in the Roman Empire. During the mid-twentieth century, there existed a traditionalist consensus in Markan scholarship based upon a combination of external and internal evidence, with the testimony of Papias of Hierapolis being central, that Mark was written 64–70 CE by John Mark, a companion of Peter, in Rome.¹ A broad reassessment of Mark's provenance began, however, in response to a 1956 publication by Willi Marxsen, who suggested that Mark was composed for an audience in Southern Syria/Galilee in 68 CE for a community that fled Jerusalem toward Pella in expectation of the parousia.² The debates that have ensued as part of this scholarly reassessment of Markan provenance have broadly revolved

¹ Papias, cited by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15, references Mark as Peter's follower and interpreter who wrote, according to his memory, the words and deeds of Jesus as Peter had told them to him.

² Willi Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956).

around (1) whether Mark was written before the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE or after the temple's fall and (2) whether Mark was written for a Syrian, Galilean, or Roman audience.³

Although there is still some disagreement, most scholars now hold that Mark was written after the fall of the Jerusalem temple, which occurred in 70 CE.⁴ In *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, Winn makes a strong argument that Mark was, in fact, written after the destruction of the temple. Focusing specifically on Mark 13:2, in which Jesus predicts the temple's destruction (and which is a frequent focal point for scholars attempting to date Mark), Winn examines five criteria that help shed light on whether Mark likely included this prophecy—and thus wrote his Gospel—*pre factum* (before the temple was actually destroyed) or *post factum* (after the temple was destroyed).⁵

Three of Winn's criteria suggest that Mark could have included Jesus's prophecy *pre factum*: specificity, reasonableness, and similarity. That is, the prediction found in Mark's text is quite general, including little specific detail to suggest knowledge of actual events having transpired. Further, considerable criticism of the temple in the final years of the Second Temple period, combined with a volatile relationship between the Jews and Rome, makes such a prediction about the temple's destruction reasonable. Finally, the existence of similar prophecies in other literature

³ In discussing where Mark was written, scholars have often assumed that the locale of composition is the same as the locale of the intended audience. I address this again in the following section. For an overview of the consensus view and the twentieth-century scholarly debate over Mark's date and audience, especially in regard to these particular points of debate, consult John R. Donahue, "The Quest for the Community of Mark's Gospel," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, ed. Frans van Segbroeck et al., vol. 2, BETL 100 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 817–35. The authorship of Mark has also been questioned, and most scholars now avoid the claim that it was written by Peter's companion John Mark. For an overview of the authorship debate, consult Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 2–6. Identifying the specific identity of Mark's author is not important for my argument.

⁴ Taking the minority stance, Collins argues that Mark was probably written before 70 CE, most likely after Simon of Gioras became the major leader of the Jewish revolt in 68 or 69 (*Mark*, 14).

⁵ Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, 57–58. Winn helpfully points out that the scholarly quest to determine the authenticity of this prophecy (i.e., did it truly come from Jesus?) relates only indirectly to whether Mark wrote pre- or post-70. Even if the prophecy were an authentic saying of Jesus, Mark still could have been written after 70 CE. Thus, the real question should be whether the prophecy in Mark 13:2 was *pre factum* or *post factum*. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 11–14. Collins bases her argument on Mark 13 but not primarily on 13:2.

increases the likelihood that Mark would have included such a prophecy even before the temple was destroyed.⁶

On the other hand, Winn argues that the remaining two criteria, motivation and risk-reward, suggest that Mark wrote the account of Jesus's temple-destruction prophecy *post factum*. It is possible that Mark could have been motivated to include this prophecy *pre factum* to further an anti-temple sentiment that critiques corrupt leadership and thus predicts the temple's destruction; however, such a sentiment is otherwise uncorroborated in pre-70 Christian literature, which would make Mark an anomaly if such were true. While it is also possible that Mark included the prophecy because the temple's destruction was imminent and seemed inevitable, it is hard to believe that Jewish Christians would have accepted the temple's coming destruction until it was a reality. Thus, while these *pre-factum* motivations for Mark's use of the prophecy are possible, Winn does not find them compelling. He finds two *post-factum* motivations far more compelling: (1) furthering the reliability of Jesus and (2) offering the audience stability and understanding during a crisis. As for risk-reward, Mark risks a great deal with little reward if he places a temple destruction prophecy on Jesus's lips before the destruction has happened, whereas he risks nothing by using this prophecy *post factum* while gaining the reward of portraying Jesus as a powerful prophet. Winn argues that the last two criteria for determining the timing of Mark are more significant than the first three, and he concludes that the prophecy is placed on Jesus's lips in Mark *post factum*, thus claiming that Mark was written after the temple fell.⁷

In his more recent *Reading Mark's Christology under Caesar*, Winn adds to his post-70 argument by emphasizing the prominence of the anti-temple motif in Mark 11–12, especially as it relates to a

⁶ Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, 58–61.

⁷ Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, 61–67. Winn goes on to argue that, other than this prophecy in 13:2, Mark's Jesus seems to be talking about the eschaton in Mark 13. Cf. 68–76.

possible crisis the Gentile Markan audience may have been facing. According to Winn, the inclusion of such an extended motif suggests that something has happened to the temple, prompting Mark to be the first Christian author writing to a Gentile audience who features the temple leadership's corruption and the temple's destruction. In particular, Emperor Vespasian's featuring of the temple destruction in the propaganda he used to consolidate his power was a source of confusion for Gentile Christians and a hindrance to the evangelistic cause of the Christian mission. As such, Mark attempts to disarm the Flavian propaganda by claiming "that the Roman destruction of the temple was a result of its corruption, that it occurred according to God's purpose and was predicted by God's appointed ruler, Jesus."⁸

In general, I agree with the scholarly consensus of dating Mark after the fall of the temple, likely in or soon after 70 CE. Further, I find Winn's evaluation of Mark's date in *The Purpose of Mark's Gospel* to be useful, especially because he focuses on whether the prophecy of 13:2 is included *pre* or *post factum* rather than simply basing arguments for date upon whether the prophecy was authentic or a *vaticinium ex eventu* (prophecy after the fact). Nevertheless, Winn discusses likelihoods, and thus his argument is not definitive, as he acknowledges to an extent.⁹ Winn's more recent argument in *Reading Mark's Christology under Caesar* makes a very reasonable case for sudden Gentile interest in the temple: the temple's recent destruction.¹⁰ Even if Mark was written after the temple's destruction, however, it is also reasonable to suggest that Mark's audience was aware of the temple's destruction and perhaps confused about its implications without assuming a response to specific

⁸ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 32–37, esp. 37.

⁹ Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, 76. In light of his five-criteria assessment, Winn states that "we *must* conclude that Mark was written no earlier than 70 C.E., at some point after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple" (emphasis added). He softens his statement in the next sentence, however: "we have sought to demonstrate that a post 70 dating of Mark *could* adequately explain the realities found in Mark 13" (emphasis added).

¹⁰ Part of Winn's argument is that Paul's works, the major sources that allow us a window into early Gentile Jesus-following communities, do not take a marked interest in the temple or its possible destruction (*Reading Mark's Christology*, 36–37).

Flavian propaganda. As such, I tend to agree with Winn's rationale for a post-temple date, with two caveats: (1) it is not definitive, and (2) I find Winn's link to Flavian propaganda plausible without being necessary to understand Mark. In fact, regardless of whether Mark was written before, during, or after 70 CE, it is sufficient for interpretative purposes to know that Mark was composed well within the period of the growing empire and of the relative novelty of the role of emperor.

Mark's Audience

Scholars have sometimes assumed that the location of Mark's composition (provenance) and its intended audience were one and the same community. Except where specified otherwise, such is the case for the scholars I discuss in this section. The idea has often been that the audience's circumstances, with which the author is familiar due to proximity, have considerably affected the contents of the Gospel.¹¹

Again, the traditionalist stance is that Mark was written in Rome, but, as it did with the date of Mark, Marxsen's work launched reconsideration of this view. During the 1970s and 1980s, several scholars argued that Mark was written in the East, although these scholars disagreed on exactly where in the East. Thus, Werner Kelber (1974) argued that Mark was written in Galilee, and Ched Myers (1988) argued more specifically for rural Galilee.¹² Others held that Mark was written in southern Syria, including Howard Clark Kee (1977), Burton Mack (1988), and Gerd Theissen (1989).¹³ Similarly, Herman C. Waetjen (1989) argued that Mark was written in Roman-occupied

¹¹ But the singularity of audience and provenance is not a given, nor does an author need to be in or near a particular community to understand its circumstances and needs.

¹² Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). Kelber argues that Mark was written post-70 in Galilee in an attempt to counter the Jerusalem church's stance on claims to authority, exclusion of Gentiles, and teaching about the parousia. Myers argues that Mark was written in 69 CE in rural Galilee between two sieges of the Jerusalem temple. Mark's Gospel was intended to offer a middle course between Rome's imperialism and "the hegemony and human-oppressing political economy of the elitist temple establishment" (*Binding the Strong Man*, esp. 127).

Syria.¹⁴ Still others, such as Ernest Best (1983) and Martin Hengel (1983), continued to argue for Roman provenance.¹⁵

In 1992 John Donahue observed that, while a trend toward dating Mark post-70 was emerging in scholarship, Mark's community was still the subject of great disagreement. Noting the difficulties of oft-used redaction criticism for positing an audience and warning against equating a Gospel's setting with its audience, Donahue expressed little optimism that agreement over Mark's community would emerge.¹⁶ Then, in 2000 Dwight Peterson critiqued attempts to posit a specific Markan audience and to base interpretive control on such determinations. In his work, he points out that each scholar who posits a community proposes a different situation, resulting in very different readings of Mark. Peterson argues that such attempts are viciously circular and that the meaning of Mark does not derive from knowing author's intent or audience. Instead, interpretive control of Mark (or any Gospel) should lie within interpretive communities, the Church being one such community.¹⁷

Around the same time Donahue and Peterson were questioning the likelihood and fruitfulness of a scholarly determination of Mark's original audience, other scholars began arguing

¹³ Howard Clark Kee, *The Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977). Kee argued that Mark was written in southern Syria between 66 and 70 CE (pre-temple fall) for a community that was expecting the parousia and experiencing persecution from Rome. Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Gerd Theissen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, NTOA 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989); ET: *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

¹⁴ Herman Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

¹⁵ Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983). Martin Hengel, "Probleme des Markusevangeliums," in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien: Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium 1982*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 221–66.

¹⁶ Donahue, "Quest," 835–38. Beyond critiquing certain pitfalls of redaction-critical approaches, Donahue suggests that (1) efforts to determine Mark's community based on Mark 13 may very well lead to a dead end; (2) a clear setting within the Gospel does not necessitate that same locale of its audience; and (3) more work needs to be done that focuses on the kind of community to which Mark is directed, not just the location and date of Mark.

¹⁷ Dwight N. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in Current Debate* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Peterson focuses his critique on Kelber, Kee, and Myers.

for a broader Markan audience than a single community. In 1989 Mary Ann Tolbert argued that Mark was written by an “anonymous author writing in koine Greek to a Greek-speaking predominately Gentile audience” in the late first-century CE, which “is about as specific as our knowledge can be concerning the history of the Gospel’s production.”¹⁸ As for audience, Mark represents popular literature aimed at a wide spectrum of society (elite and non-elite), just like the ancient erotic novels.¹⁹ Tolbert further argues that Mark was written for a wide audience of individuals facing persecution or considering Christianity rather than to a single community.²⁰ Then, in 1998, Richard Bauckham argued that all four canonical Gospels were written “for any and every” Christian in the first century CE.²¹ In his essay, Bauckham argues not that the Gospels were written for wide audiences but that the Gospel authors wrote *intentionally* with *every Christian* in mind.²²

Scholars such as Peterson, Bauckham, and Tolbert are critical of efforts to link Mark’s production and especially audience to a particular locale. Peterson’s work draws attention to the pitfall of particular interpretive methods—especially that of redaction criticism—as being dependent upon intense circular reasoning (regarding internal evidence) to determine Mark’s first community. This is perhaps one reason why external evidence, if reliable, can be a helpful tool for considering Mark’s earliest audience. Peterson’s appeal to the authority of interpretive communities, however, is

¹⁸ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 36.

¹⁹ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 70–78.

²⁰ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 303–305. In particular, Tolbert argues that the narrative form of Mark and its thematic emphases make it ill-suited to have been written for a single community. She also argues that Rome or another major city is a likely locale for the place of Mark’s *composition*.

²¹ Richard Bauckham, “Introduction,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–8, esp. 1.

²² Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?,” in Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians*, 9–48. Bauckham makes several interconnected arguments, with four points being especially noteworthy. First, Mark circulated widely (we know because Matthew and Luke used Mark), so Mark was *meant to circulate widely*; thus, Matthew and Luke, in supplanting Mark, intended that their works would do so as well. Second, the Gospels are biographies, a genre written for broad audiences. Third, for Christian leaders and people in general, mobility rates were high in the empire, making the sharing of documents fairly easy. Fourth, Christians understood themselves as a unified, worldwide movement.

not very useful to the scholar seeking to understand something about how Mark functioned in its ancient context and is in some ways subject to an “anything goes” mindset.²³ Peterson’s argument is most valuable in that it draws attention to the notion that knowledge of a specific, exact community might not be necessary to make good sense of the Gospel.

The arguments of Bauckham and Tolbert have a similarly useful effect inasmuch as they prompt reflection upon the need to identify a single, localized community for Mark; however, both have come under critique on certain points. For instance, Bauckham has been criticized for claiming that no evidence existed before the twentieth century to suggest that the Gospels were written for particular audiences. Additionally, Bauckham tends toward overstatement, and his argument adopts the logical fallacy that the eventual spread of the Gospels means their authors intended for them to spread.²⁴ Despite these and other issues with Bauckham’s argument, he has been impactful in prompting scholars to consider at least whether the Gospel writers may have written knowing that their works might spread far and wide, and he has offered an important critique of the hermeneutical assumptions inherent in redaction-critical approaches to identifying the Gospel audiences.²⁵ Tolbert’s more tempered argument draws connections between Mark and other

²³ On the one hand, his proposal for interpretive communities may be a realistic perspective on how the Gospels are frequently read outside scholarly circles. On the other hand, this suggestion leaves room for the possibility that, if the Church agrees that Mark is to be read as being written in Rome in 65 CE in response to Nero, for example, such will be as good an interpretation as any other.

²⁴ Bauckham has been rightly critiqued for overstating the scope and unity of the Christian movement its early stages and for treating the Gospels as if they are letters by arguing that no one would write to one’s own community. Consult especially Margaret Mitchell, “Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that ‘The Gospels Were Written for All Christians.’” *NTS* 51 (2005): 36–79. Mitchell’s most important critique of Bauckham is noting that the second-century evidence simply does not cohere with his claim that community-specific views of the Gospels are only modern phenomena (Clement, Chrysostom, Gregory, Gospel prologues, e.g.). In “Is there Patristic Counter-Evidence? A Response to Margaret Mitchell,” *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origins and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, ed. Edward W. Klink III, *LNTS* 353 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 68–110, Bauckham provides a helpful clarification of his basic argument in *The Gospel for All Christians*: while patristic sources discuss the supposed original communities in which the Gospels were written, in so doing these sources do not claim the same hermeneutical significance for the meaning of each Gospel that modern redaction-critical studies have done.

²⁵ E.g., Philip Esler acknowledges that Bauckham’s proposal has led him to consider a new idea: that the Gospels were written with a fairly specific community in mind, but their authors realized their documents might spread and supplant others (“Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham’s *Gospels for All*”).

Hellenistic literature intended for broad audiences. While she has been critiqued for too quickly dismissing the Gospel's narrative format as potentially effective for individual communities, she otherwise draws strong comparisons between Mark's Gospel and the ancient novels in support of the notion that Mark *would* communicate effectively to a wide audience that includes a broad spectrum of society.²⁶

Peterson, Bauckham, and Tolbert's arguments have not prevented continued efforts to define a specific audience for Mark's Gospel, although many scholars now proceed with more caution than was previously used when positing a particular community for Mark. Among those scholars who continue to argue for a specific community as Mark's intended audience, Rome has once again become a frequently posited locale, as is the case for Donahue (despite his doubts that a consensus will emerge, he has more recently argued for a Roman audience), Brian Incigneri, and Winn. Each of these three scholars focuses on the role of persecution and apostasy in Mark, which would have made sense in a Roman setting soon after the reign of Nero, and Incigneri and Winn each emphasize Roman political allusions in the Gospel, including triumphs and strategic use of Roman ruler language.²⁷

Christians," *SJT* 51 [1998]: 235–48). Cf. Richard Bauckham, "Response to Philip Esler," *SJT* 51 (1998): 249–53. Bauckham rejects this as a "non-position," but it seems to have merit, at least for Matthew and Luke. It is harder to say with Mark, who wrote first.

²⁶ Brian Incigneri responds to Tolbert's claim that gospels were not effective means of addressing theological issues in particular communities by asserting that Tolbert "overlooks the transforming power of the Gospel narrative upon communities for nearly two thousand years" (*The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel*, BibInt 65 [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 32).

²⁷ According to Donahue, "Mark's narrative world takes up the concerns of a community located in Rome which has experienced persecution, brutal executions, and intrafamilial betrayal" ("Windows and Mirrors: The Setting of Mark's Gospel," *CBQ* 57 [1995]: 1–26, esp. 19–20). Consult also Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*, 194–96; Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 31–32; Incigneri, *Gospel to the Romans*, 105–108, 116–54. Winn and Incigneri both argue that persecution of Christians was not widespread in the Roman Empire at this time, especially after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem. It was really only in Rome that residual persecution from Nero was a problem for Christians. Further, the apostasy caused by martyrdoms would have only been significant in such a context. Hendrika N. Roskam has argued, however, for Galilean provenance of Mark, and she is particularly attentive to the role of persecution in the work (*The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context*, NovTSup 114 [Leiden: Brill, 2004]).

Both Winn and Incigneri also investigate the external and other internal evidence for a Roman provenance and audience. Incigneri holds that both the external and the internal evidence support Roman provenance without question.

With arguments for wide audiences and localized audiences still afoot today, the question of where and to whom Mark was written remains unsettled in scholarship, as Donahue predicted it would nearly thirty years ago. For the purposes of this argument, however, the lack of scholarly consensus is not a problem that needs to be solved. The benefits of the ongoing Markan community debate are as follows. First, the debate has disallowed complacency concerning Mark's audience, consequently prompting reconsideration of what specific features of Mark may or may not suggest a particular audience. Second, it has resulted in a greater reluctance among many scholars to trace specific details in Mark too closely to a supposed intended audience's precise situation à la redaction criticism. Sometimes, however, even scholars who attempt to avoid an overly specific treatment of Mark's audience and their situation still envision the audience's circumstances in considerable detail, as does Winn. Third, the debate has drawn attention to the widespread circulation of Mark. Whether this Gospel was written for a specific community or for a broader audience, the Gospel obviously communicated effectively enough to circulate widely within a matter of years. It was relevant to more than one community almost immediately.

Finally, the debate has drawn attention to the influence of Rome on the Gospel. Regardless of precisely where and to whom Mark's Gospel was originally written, it is quite clear that the Greco-Roman setting and especially the imperial influence of Rome affected how Mark was composed, even though Mark only explicitly mentions Rome at certain points. Further, as I aim to demonstrate moving forward, we can deduce that readers and hearers of Mark's Gospel in the latter part of the mid-first century CE could have easily made connections between Mark and the rule of Rome (both general ideology/recent history and specific political events) that inevitably affected their lives, whether the author of Mark was specifically referencing particular events or not.

Winn is more hesitant to rely on the notoriously questioned external evidence (which all points to Rome), so he sticks with the internal evidence. This evidence, as rehearsed by Winn and Incigneri, includes but is not limited to: (1) Latinisms, (2) translations of Aramaic, and (3) explanations of Jewish customs.

Conclusion

Whether Mark was written for a specific or general audience in 70 CE or at another date, if the Gospel was written squarely within the context of the early Principate, it makes sense that the rule of Rome would come to bear on how Mark was interpreted by its early audiences. Relatedly, it also makes sense that the rule of the emperor would be a poignant point of comparison to a literary depiction of Jesus, himself hailed as a leader and ruler in his own right. The impact of Rome and its rulers on the discourse of Mark's narrative becomes clear in chapters 4–7. Before beginning that analysis, with Mark's first-century Roman imperial context in mind, I now turn to a final task involved in laying the groundwork for my analysis of Mark: establishing a framework for first-century Roman notions of honor and shame.

CHAPTER 3

HONOR AND SHAME IN MARK'S CONTEXT

People frequently strive for distinction, admiration, and dignity in life, and the complex culture of the Roman Empire from the first century BCE until the second century CE was no exception. But what exactly constituted honor or brought honor upon someone in this place and time? Honor could be and was defined in multiple ways in the ancient world, within the Roman Empire, and even within Roman culture. The same is true for shame. In establishing a framework for understanding ancient Roman honor and shame, it is worthwhile to consider both the lexical range of these concepts in Greek and Latin and their conceptual reach even in the absence of certain terms. Thus, in this chapter I discuss certain specific terms related to honor and shame while working to establish a broader framework for what it meant to have honor or be shamed in the first-century Roman Empire.

I am especially concerned with Roman notions of honor, not because Roman honor is the only conception of honor conceivably meaningful to Mark and Mark's intended and eventual audiences, but because Mark's own concern with its Roman imperial setting leads to a fruitful question: how might the Gospel of Mark mean (recall Malbon's *how a text means*) to those particularly familiar with Roman political and social realities? I recognize that Roman culture was necessarily impacted by outside forces, not least Classical and Hellenistic Greek culture. Thus, some of the concepts and sources I use to establish a framework of what I call Roman honor come not from Rome itself but from the broader Roman Empire (or, if slightly before the empire, still in areas

dominated by Rome). As such, my primary emphasis remains on Roman honor, both in a generalized sense and while allowing for cultural complexity.

An Overview of Roman Notions of Honor and Shame

While various terms were used to connote honor in the first century, the Greek term *honos* and the Latin term *τιμή* provide a useful starting point for reflecting upon the ways in which honor was conceptualized in a Roman imperial context. The standard definition of *honos* is “high esteem or respect accorded to superior worth or rank, honour” and “a particular mark of esteem, an honour.”¹ *Honos* can refer to something awarded for distinction in various areas of life, such as war or public office, or to a quality that inspires or confers dignity.² *Τιμή* carries a very similar set of meanings and connotations, referring variously to an action, disposition, or object. Notably, it can refer to “worship, esteem, honor,” to a person’s “dignity, lordship, as in the attribute of gods or kings,” or to civic honors.³

As is evidenced by the language of esteem, respect, and the conferral of honors, a crucial aspect of Roman honor was its public nature. According to J. E. Lendon, one way to view the aristocratic life of the Roman Empire is “as a ceaseless, restless quest for distinction in the eyes of one’s peers and of posterity.”⁴ Distinction would result from some combination of one’s qualities and achievements, evaluated imprecisely and somewhat variously, *as long as a person was known*. That is, honor was a “public verdict,” though one that was constantly being assessed and reassessed.⁵ To

¹ “*Honos*,” in *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 801–2.

² “*Honos*,” *OLD*, 802.

³ *τιμή*,” in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. and aug. Sir Henry Stuart Jones with Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 1793–94.

⁴ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 35.

⁵ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 36. There was also a component to honor that entailed scrutinizing and controlling the self even when others did not or could not. Cf. Barton, “Being in the Eyes,” 222–23.

an extent, the greater a person's honor, the more closely that person was watched by others.⁶

Discussing the ancient Romans more generally, Carlin A. Barton explains that "Being, for a Roman, was being seen."⁷ Roman honor was a willingness to be witnessed, an ability to withstand the spotlight.⁸ Although there was certainly a private component to honor, it was very often, and very deeply, public in nature.

On the individual level, honor was about one's "face"—not the physical face, but the presentation of the self inevitably "seen" and thus evaluated by others. "One's face was one's *persona*, one's mask. The *persona* was composed of the reputation (*existimatio*, *fama*, and *nomen*), supported by effective energy (*virtus*), and enforced by a sensitivity to shame (*pudor*)."⁹ Again, honor was related to what others thought of a person. Consider the term *fama*, which means not only "one's good name, reputation," but also "fame, glory, renown."¹⁰ This idea is also central in the Greek term δόξα, meaning "the opinion which others have of one, estimation, repute," and "good repute, honour, glory."¹¹ As Barton suggests, one's reputation was impacted by the kind of person one was. *Virtus* refers to "excellence of character or mind, worth, merit, ability" and "moral excellence, virtue, goodness;" it also connoted manliness, "valour, [and] steadfastness."¹² Finally, sensitivity to shame

⁶ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 39.

⁷ Barton, "Being in the Eyes," 220.

⁸ Barton, "Being in the Eyes," 220–21.

⁹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 57.

¹⁰ "*fama*," OLD, 674. *Fama* can also refer to any sort of news or to rumor or slander.

¹¹ "δόξα," LSJ, 444. Less commonly, δόξα can also reference a "notion, opinion, judgment," even to the point of conjecture or false visions. A few other Greek terms relating to the concept of one's reputation are εὐφημία and ἔπαινος. Εὐφημία relates to the English word *euphemism*, indicating the avoidance of inauspicious language or using honorable language for something negative; it also refers to "prayer and praise, worship" when offered to gods or "honor, good repute enjoyed" by people. "εὐφημία," LSJ, 736. The term ἔπαινος means "approval, praise, commendation." "ἔπαινος," LSJ, 604. Similarly, both the Latin terms *gloria* and *laus* refer to praise or honor bestowed upon someone. "*gloria*," OLD, 767; "*laus*," OLD, 1010–11.

¹² "*virtus*," OLD, 2073–74.

was an important part of one's honor. The convergence of repute, morality, and sensitivity to shame is discussed in what follows.

How Honor was Assessed and Gained

Honor could be gained, lost, shared, and shown for another. It was about accomplishment and comportment, morality and virtue, and faithfulness and persistence, especially as all of these qualities converged into how others perceived a person. Overarchingly, honor was related to public esteem and personal dignity, and it was an assessment of one's perceived worth.¹³ It was about being both included and approved of by others and yet to an extent excluding others, that is, excelling above the rest.¹⁴ It could be assessed or gained in a variety of ways. There was no single set of standards or an exact formula for computing a person's honor, and people of all social statuses strove for and could be esteemed by others to have honor.

Honor among Aristocrats

"The conceptions of honour held by aristocratic Greek- and Latin-speakers of the Roman empire evolved from the values of their distant ancestors": Homeric Greece and early Rome.¹⁵ Lendon explains that, for aristocrats, being of a certain means, legal status, and background was considered honorable: in addition to a general sense of elegance and high culture, "high birth in an illustrious home town, wealth (provided it came from reputable sources, and preferably in the form of landed estates), legal status (that of a senator or an equestrian, or at least a citizen, not that of a freedman or slave), a great house, a grand procession of slaves and clients on the street, expensive

¹³ Consider the adjective *dignus*, meaning "deserving" or "appropriate, suitable, worthy." "*dignus*," *OLD*, 542.

¹⁴ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 33.

¹⁵ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 31–32.

clothes.”¹⁶ While wealth and status were important, and thus so were displays of wealth and status, some criticized excess luxury and opulent displays.¹⁷

What aristocrats did also mattered. They should not work for profit and especially not with the hands, nor should they draw attention to themselves dramatically. They could be granted honor for a number of accomplishments in military and civil settings, for holding political or religious offices, for acts of benefaction for their cities, and for being popular with the lower classes.¹⁸

Consider the poet Horace’s words in his *Odes*: “There are some who enjoy raising Olympic dust with their chariots (the turning post just cleared by their scorching wheels, and the palm of glory [*nobilis*], exalt them to heaven as lords of the earth); one man is delighted if the mob of fickle citizens strive to elevate him to the three great offices [*honoribus*]” (1.1.3–8 [Rudd, LCL]).¹⁹

As already stated, being known for moral excellence conferred honor. Aristocrats often lived morally upstanding lives (or wanted to be perceived as so doing) in order to maintain honor and

¹⁶ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 36–38, esp. 36. Cf. Ramsay MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 191.

¹⁷ Although the poet Horace speaks of bestowing honor upon others with outward signs of esteem, he is turned off by excessive displays of wealth and prestige. Thus, in *Carm.* 1.26, Horace wants to honor one Lamia; he asks the Muse to “weave sunny flowers, weave them into a garland” for Lamia (1.26.6–7 [Rudd, LCL]). Without the Muse, he says, his *honores* are nothing (1.26.9–10). In *Carm.* 1.38, however, he expresses his dislike for elaborate pomp, especially when it comes to garlands. Horace considers the myrtle to be sufficiently simple for his slave and for himself. Horace’s dislike for immense luxury and show surfaces in *Carm.* 2.15 as well. Here, he praises the days of old, such as the days of Romulus and of Cato, during which Romans concerned themselves with the common good, the people paid to adorn the temples of the gods, and they were satisfied with small farms (2.15.13–20). Now, to his dismay, the land is becoming inundated with great estates, large fishponds, and huge porticoes (2.15.1–10). There is excess all around.

¹⁸ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 38–40, 86–87; Danker, *Benefactor*, 30; Arjan Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire: Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10–11.

Linguistically, certain terms connected one’s honor with a combination of appropriate behavior and high accomplishment. Thus, *decus* means “high esteem, honour, glory,” a source of distinction, or “honourable or seemly behaviour, dignity, decorum.” “*decus*,” *OLD*, 495. *Maiestas* means “majesty, grandeur” or dignity, and it can refer to rank or office. “*maiestas*,” *OLD*, 1065.

On making money, Cicero states, “As for property, it is a duty to make money, but only by honourable means; it is a duty also to save it and increase it by care and thrift. These principles Xenophon, a pupil of Socrates, has set forth most happily in his book entitled ‘Oeconomicus’” (*Off.* 2.24.87 [Miller, LCL]).

¹⁹ Horace himself needs only one honor, which he considers the best reward: for Maecenas to rank him among the lyric poets, in which case, “I shall soar aloft and strike the stars with my head” (*Carm.* 1.1.35–36 [Rudd, LCL]).

avoid shame. The connection between honor and morality can be observed linguistically, as, in both Greek and Latin, language for goodness was directly connected to honor: *καλός* means both “morally beautiful” and “honorable”; *ἀγαθός* means “good and well-born”; *bonus* means “morally good and (in plural) men of substance and social standing.”²⁰

Horace asserts that, in politics and personal life, it is virtue (*virtus*) that brings honor (*honoribus*):

Virtue, rejecting everything that's sordid,
Shines with unblemished honor, nor takes up office
Nor puts it down persuaded by any shift
Of the popular wing; virtue shows the way
To those who deserve to know it, disdaining the crowd,
Taking its flight to heaven on scornful wings. (*Carm.* 3.2.17–24 [Ferry])

So interconnected were morality and honor that the historian Tacitus reports the common sentiment that “scorn for renown [*famae*] means scorning virtues [*virtutes*]” (*Ann.* 4.38.5 [Damon]).²¹ Tacitus’s words do not mean that any method of seeking fame (and therefore honor) was acceptable or associated with goodness; in fact, Horace’s poetry suggests seeking popularity can get in the way of virtue and true honor. Tacitus’s words simply speak to the close association between the concepts of honor in the form of fame and virtue. Such is confirmed in Sallust’s description of Cato the Younger, whom Sallust describes as seeking goodness rather than cheap fame. Paradoxically, Cato’s honor increased because of his devotion to goodness: “the less he sought renown [*gloriam*], the more it overtook him” (Sallust, *Bell. Cat.* 54.6 [Ramsey, LCL]). Connected to honor and morality was the concept of *σωφροσύνη*, the wisdom of self-restraint (Cicero translates *σωφροσύνη* four ways:

temperantia [self-control], *moderatio* [moderation], *modestia* [restraint], and *frugalitas* [frugality; *Tusc.*

²⁰ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 41, 41n52. Similarly, *honestum* refers to something morally honorable. “*honestum*,” OLD, 801. *Pius* is an adjective meaning “faithful to one’s moral obligations [to religion, family, society], dutiful, conscientious, upright,” and it is related to the noun *pietas*. “*pius*,” OLD, 1384, cf. 1378.

²¹ Citations of *Annals* correspond to Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. Cynthia Damon (New York: Penguin, 2012). When Latin is referenced, LCL volumes are consulted.

3.8.16]). This concept so defined represents a development in Roman honor especially in the imperial period: one did not respond to insult by lashing out with violence. Common sentiment held that only the unsophisticated stooped to violence; to do so was dishonorable.²²

In all of this, however, there remained a wide variety of what constituted honor. This was true in part because the Roman Empire was a conglomeration of different groups; not all aristocratic groups held the same precise criteria for honor. Often, one group's standards were more or less accepted by another group: "The aristocracy of the whole empire was not a single community of honour, but many overlapping communities as prepared to accept each other's standards of honour as they were, by and large, prepared to accept other's gods."²³ The bottom line for high status people was that a person possessed honor when that person was publicly praised by those who already had public esteem. As Lendon puts it, "anything praised by aristocrats conferred glory."²⁴

The Honor of Emperors

As aristocrats extraordinaire, emperors held a great deal of honor.²⁵ This is not to say that every emperor was unquestioningly honored no matter the circumstances. For example, Tacitus, in writing his *Annals*, describes his literary task of presenting governmental developments, including the actions of emperors, as follows: "My policy is to trace proposals in detail only if conspicuously honourable [*bonestum*] or of noteworthy disgrace [*dedecore*], for in my view the principal obligation of

²² Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 41–42. Cf. Helen F. North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), esp. 258–311. Σωφροσύνη does not translate easily into Latin in part because it did not have a single, stable meaning. It was also a thoroughly Greek concept. Nonetheless, there was a deep Roman appreciation for restraint, modesty, frugality, and the like.

²³ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 43.

²⁴ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 40, 48.

²⁵ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 109. Cf. Barton, *Roman Honor*, 105–6. Barton discusses the disproportionately great power (as related to honor) of emperors over all others.

histories is that manifestations of excellence not go unspoken and, for perverse words and deeds, to generate fear from posterity and infamy” (3.65.1 [Damon]).²⁶

Emperors were praised for being of notable birth and city of origin, for literary accomplishments, and for civic and military deeds. They could also use their position and power to coerce honor. This tactic was maligned but effective as long as that emperor’s power remained secure. It was considered far better, and more secure, however, for an emperor to seek honor through his deeds: through success in war and imperial building in the provinces, for example.²⁷ Horace praises Augustus for bringing peace to Rome: “With Caesar in charge of affairs, peace will not be driven out by civic madness or violence, or by the anger that beats out swords and makes cities wretched by turning them against one another” (*Carm.* 4.15.17–20 [Rudd, LCL]).²⁸ For their military triumphs, emperors could be honored with the spectacular triumphal procession.²⁹ An

²⁶ In his treatment of the emperor Claudius, Tacitus subtly critiques Claudius’s honor, who is constantly giving in to the contrivances and the opinions of those around him, thus displaying little commitment to anything (*Ann.* 11.31–33; 12.3.1–2; 12.49; 12.60; 13.3.1). For Tacitus, even Claudius’s good deeds are somehow connected to ignominious situations. For instance, while Claudius is attending to Rome’s law and religion, he is completely oblivious to his wife Messalina’s scandalous affair (11.13). When he reforms the senate’s membership, several senators worry that the senate’s valor (*virtutem*) and glory (*gloriam*) will be debased if foreigners are allowed in it, which Claudius ends up allowing (11.23).

Tacitus also critiques Nero on several fronts, including Nero’s insistence on racing chariots and publicly performing song and poem, deeming Nero’s behavior shameful (*Ann.* 14.14–16). Nero is portrayed as shameful in other literature as well. Sarah Ruden speculates that Petronius may be drawing upon Nero’s immoderate and theatrical dinner parties as he depicts the more lavish aspects of Trimalchio’s party. For instance, in a dining room in Nero’s palace, there was a roof with shifting panels set up to sprinkle perfume and flower petals on guests. Similarly, Trimalchio has gold garlands and alabaster ointment bottles swing down from the ceiling as party favors (60). Both Nero and Trimalchio also employ highly theatrical production. Trimalchio brings out acrobats, including a boy dancing on the top rung of a ladder. No one other than Trimalchio is impressed, and when the boy falls on top of Trimalchio, Encolpius comments that the guests are in an uproar only because they do not want their evening ruined by pretending to care about the wellbeing of a “low-life acrobat” (53–4 [Ruden]). According to Ruden, “Nero loved staging innovative plays. Once, an actor playing the mythical boy Icarus in flight fell off a stage apparatus and landed fatally at Nero’s feet, spattering the emperor with blood” (“Commentary 6: Roman Dinner Parties” in *Satyricon*, by Petronius, 164–5). Ruden suggests Petronius helped plan some of Nero’s parties. Citations of the *Satyricon* correspond to the Ruden edition, while Latin terms are drawn from the LCL edition.

²⁷ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 113–16, cf. 129–31. The emperor’s honor went a long way toward encouraging his subjects’ obedience and cooperation. Lack of secure honor had the opposite effect: it made ruling more difficult.

²⁸ Horace claims that the people now have such a good life that, on both regular days and holidays, they can spend time singing “in our fathers’ fashion of leaders who lived their lives like true men, of Troy and Anchises and the offspring of kindly Venus” (*Carm.* 4.15.29–32 [Rudd, LCL]).

²⁹ Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 1, 69; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 112.

emperor could also gain or preserve his honor by doing favors—such as providing food, money, forms of public entertainment, and disaster relief—for the empire’s cities and their residents. With such favors the emperor gained the approval of cities’ commoners and their elite.³⁰

Because the honor of emperors could become so vast, there needed to be recourse for adequately expressing (as well as bolstering) it—hence, emperors were sometimes given divine honors. Augustus allowed certain cult practices directed at him to go on during his lifetime. As Tacitus has Tiberius stating, “A temple to himself and Rome at Pergamum was not forbidden establishment by Augustus” (*Ann.* 4.37.3 [Damon]). During their lifetimes, however, most emperors were careful to resist many (though not necessarily all) of the divine honors offered them, even if only strategically in order not to appear arrogant. This was a concern especially in the western part of the empire.³¹ More generally, beginning with Augustus, it was customary for emperors to practice *recusatio*, the act of refusing various honors offered to them. In so doing, an emperor would present himself as no greater than the senate or the people as a whole, thus emphasizing “the continuity with the republican past; the dependence of the emperor on the consent of the upper orders; but above all the use of the social structure of a city-state to organize and unify the disparate peoples of the empire.”³² This had the paradoxical effect of reinforcing the emperor’s honor while demonstrating his measure.

³⁰ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 120–27. Cf. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire*, 194–95.

³¹ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 168–70.

³² Wallace-Hadrill, “Civilis Princeps,” 48. In fact, Wallace-Hadrill notes that Augustus and Vespasian were, according to Suetonius, the models for such behavior. According to Wallace-Hadrill, this Roman sentiment was influenced somewhat by Hellenistic thinking rather than by purely Greek sentiment.

Honor among the Non-Elite

To an extent, those of high status may have contended that no one below them truly had honor. Lendon asserts, “When a great aristocrat peered down into society beneath him, there was a threshold beneath which, to his mind, honour did not exist; there were people, a great many people, without honour, and best kept that way.”³³ Reality was, however, more complicated. While in one sense those of high status may have perceived those below them as worthy of neither insult nor praise, in another sense they realized things were not so simple. At times aristocrats bestowed honor on those below them, and they were well aware that even slaves vied for honor among themselves.³⁴

Further, as aristocrats were not the only—and not even the majority—of people in the empire, aristocratic opinions of other’s honor (or lack thereof) only constituted one aspect of the lived experience. Non-elite persons cared about and strove for honor. Non-aristocratic persons considered other non-aristocratic persons to have honor. Barton emphasizes that the desire for honor was important for everyone: “The plebeian was as preoccupied with honor as the patrician, the client as the patron, the woman as the man, the child as the adult.”³⁵ In her study of late first-century BCE–late second-century CE Roman funerary inscriptions listing occupational titles for the deceased, Sandra Joshel discusses an epitaph of one “Iucundus, slave of Taurus, litter bearer,” which reads, “As long as he lived, he was a man [*vir*] and acted on behalf of himself and others. As long as he lived, he lived honorably [*honeste*].”³⁶ This epitaph, surely written by Iucundus’s social peers,

³³ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 96.

³⁴ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 96–97.

³⁵ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 11–13, esp. 11.

³⁶ Sandra Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions*, Oklahoma Series in Classical Culture (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 90. The adjective related to the adverb *honeste* is *honestus*, meaning “regarded with honor or respect,” “morally worthy of respect,” “having a fine appearance,” and “well-born, of high rank.” “*honestus*,” *OLD*, 801. Iucundus was surely not of high rank in the larger social structure, but perhaps, living as a person of honor, his life reminded his peers of the honor and esteem granted to those who were well born.

demonstrates that those of any status could and did participate in the system of honor. As Joshel points out, Iucundus was considered by his peers to have honor, regardless of what those of aristocratic status may have thought of him.³⁷

Those below the aristocratic level of society may not have been able to boast of a particular pedigree, level of wealth, or legal status, but many aspects of what constituted honor were held in common among the elite and non-elite alike. In fact, “The strategies of Roman aristocrats for preserving or redeeming their spirits were never divorced from and often—and increasingly, in the early Empire—very like those of the dependent and the enslaved.”³⁸

Sometimes those of non-elite status boasted a degree of the erudition, status, and luxury of the elite; this could be perceived as grasping above one’s station or having accomplished something of significance. Consider the freedman Trimalchio from Petronius’s satirical novel the *Satyricon*. During his dinner party, Trimalchio is portrayed as going to great lengths to display his wealth and sophistication. Although he comes across as ridiculous and laughable (which is unsurprising given the satirical nature of the work), his actions reflect a desire to impress and be esteemed by others in the same way and for the same reasons aristocrats would be.³⁹ At this same party, the freedman Hermeros criticizes another character, Ascylos, for being condescending when he is nothing but a vagabond who wears a fake gold ring, made out of boxwood, to make people think he is an

³⁷ Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*, 90–91.

³⁸ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 13.

³⁹ E.g., throughout the evening, Trimalchio interrupts his guests in attempts to make himself look more prestigious but in doing so prevents any chance for sophisticated dialogue (34, 29, 48). In recounting Greek and Roman myths, he gets the details all mixed up (50, 59). He plans to go to great lengths to make sure he is honored after his death, and he spends a great deal of time talking about these plans to his guests (71–78).

Equestrian. In contrast, Hermeros wears an iron ring that has actual significance: it is a signet ring for signing contracts (57).⁴⁰

Although they could not boast the *same* legal status or pedigree as aristocrats, this did not prevent pride in whatever status and sense of belonging those of lower classes had. Joshel's study of Roman occupations and status in the early empire exemplifies this. She demonstrates that freeborn persons, freed persons, and slaves with occupational titles listed on their epitaphs were claiming some sort of dignity and/or belonging, despite the fact that occupational titles were not a source of dignity among the elite. Although they may not have held highly esteemed public offices, the epitaphs for freeborn persons sometimes appealed to offices held in occupational *collegia*, or societies, as a source of distinction.⁴¹ Like the elite, those of lower status found distinction and a source of dignity in civic belonging or accomplishment, even if this source of distinction was gained in a specific way undesired by the elite.⁴² In some instances, those of humble origin actually rose to positions of considerable significance, earning status and honor in so doing.⁴³

As was the case among aristocrats, honor among non-aristocratic people was also related to one's morality and character. To his peers, the slave Iucundus was honorable because he lived in a

⁴⁰ Ruden, in *Satyricon*, 44 n128. Hermeros chides, "You're busy passing judgment on other people? Why don't you watch your own ass? You see a louse on someone else, but there's a tick on you" (57 [Ruden]).

⁴¹ Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*, 162–62; 85–91; 113–122. Cf. 39: Joshel actually refers to freeborn persons as "uncertain freeborn." She notes that, while the use of family names indicates that these persons were of free status, our knowledge of whether they were freeborn or gained their freedom is technically uncertain.

⁴² This sense of accomplishment and dignity extended to earning freedom from slavery. Returning to the *Satyricon*, we find Hermeros, who claims to have become a slave as a path to citizenship, rather than paying taxes as a provincial forever. Now, he lives in such a way as not to incite ridicule, he bought his own freedom, he is not in debt, and he serves as a priest of the cult of the emperor. Before he was free, he worked hard to please his master, whom he describes as the most dignified (*maiestus*) and worthy (*dignitosus*) man. He also worked hard to earn his freedom. He describes himself as a "man as good as any other" (*Homo inter homines*) (57 [Ruden]).

⁴³ Horace was the son of a freedman who ended up with a very successful literary career. Although Horace was resented for this long into his career, he demonstrates that it was possible (if exceptional) to rise to great honor from humble origins. Consult Niall Rudd, "Horace," in *Latin Literature*, vol. 2 of *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 370.

particular way: as a “man” (*vir*) whose actions were for “himself and others.”⁴⁴ Petronius’s Hemeros is honorable because he understands the meaning of goodness, discipline, piety, and valour, and although he defends the foolish Trimalchio against relatively fair critiques, he alone is depicted as being a true judge of character. Petronius seems to be saying that, out of all the ways people strive for recognition and seek to display their status—including many that are unseemly—this is the kind of person who deserves the esteem of others, regardless of social status.⁴⁵

The concept of honor was fully operable among non-elite persons. While it may not have featured established high status, prestigious family origins, or immense wealth, honor among the non-elite was fundamentally similar to honor among the elite in that it related to esteem and a sense of dignity conferred by others, even if just one’s own social group.⁴⁶ For the non-elite and elite alike, honor was also related to one’s character as perceived by others. It was also connected to a sense of modesty and inhibition, as is clear in the case of Trimalchio, and as I discuss in an overview of shame. First, however, I discuss the importance of testing honor.

Testing Honor

In Republican Rome, honor was strongly connected to military bravery in the face of death even to the point of “competitive wasting” of one’s self or one’s troops to demonstrate such bravery.⁴⁷ The association between military bravery and honor continued into the time of the

⁴⁴ Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*, 90. It is also possible that the deceased man was proud of his role as litter bearer of Taurus and that this inscription hints at that, since *Iucundus* means “agreeable,” thus allowing for the reading “he was the agreeable slave of Taurus, a litter bearer.”

⁴⁵ Petronius portrays Hemeros as the sole respectable character at Trimalchio’s dinner. It is significant that, for Petronius, the status of freedperson is not an inhibitor to honor; it is how one comports oneself.

⁴⁶ Trimalchio’s guests, all those of relatively low social status, are constantly evaluating the respectability of others at the dinner, whether guests or staff (including hired entertainers). At one point, Ascylos bursts out in dismissive laughter at Trimalchio’s party favors. In response, Hemeros launches into a harangue against Ascylos (57–8).

⁴⁷ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 41–46.

empire. For example, Virgil depicts Aeneas being celebrated by Drances for his greatness in battle (*Aen.* 11.124–26), and Tacitus implicitly critiques Claudius for being ignoble in war (*Ann.* 11.19). Horace praises discipline in war; the young man should be “toughened by experience, Disciplined in the field, and able to bear Hardship without complaint” (*Carm.* 3.2.1–4 [Ferry]).

The relationship between endurance through hardship and honor was not limited to the military realm. During the republic and the empire, honor was connected to the idea of manliness, not as a biological reality but a cultural construction of gender performance. A *vir* (“man”) was not simply a natural state but something earned through action and trial (and it was not exclusively reserved for males). A *vir* was someone who could “endure much more pain than necessary.”⁴⁸ In all areas of life, misfortune, adversity, and tribulation were considered opportunities for endurance and steadfastness of spirit, even in the face of despair. Such steadfastness was understood to reflect something of a person’s character, hence the lexical connection between *vir*, being manly, and *virtus*, being steadfast and faithful.⁴⁹

Perseverance through trial could be costly, but the Romans so associated struggle with honor that they willingly associated with—even romanticized—desperation. Barton discusses how this worked out on a national level, explaining, “The triumph of Rome was the end and fruit of a long series of often disastrous bouts with enemies, rebels, and diseases.... ‘No other nation in the world,’ according to Livy, ‘could have suffered so tremendous a series of disasters [as the war against

⁴⁸ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 39, 41. Recall that *vir* is the term used to describe the honorable slave Iucundus.

⁴⁹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 36. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, when Aeneas asks a Sibyl to see his father’s shade in Hades, she answers:

Great things do you ask, you man [*vir*] of mighty deeds, whose hand, by sword, whose piety [*pietas*], by fire, has been well tried. But have no fear, Trojan; you shall have your wish, and with my guidance you shall see the dwellings of Elysium and the latest kingdom of the universe; and you shall see your dear father’s shade. There is no way denied to virtue [*virtuti*]. (14.108–113 [Miller, LCL])

Hannibal] and not been overwhelmed' (22.54.10)....It was the honed, stripped-down soul that shone with the greatest splendor.”⁵⁰

On the individual level as well, a person's honor was confirmed by being tested, and honor could be tested, or challenged, by any person or circumstance.⁵¹ In Roman challenge culture, while the smallest of challenges mattered, the greater the stakes, the greater the glory, as both Cicero and Seneca articulate: “The greater the difficulty, the greater the glory” (Cicero, *Off.* 1.19.64 [Miller, LCL]); “the greater his torture is, the greater shall be his glory” (Seneca, *Prov.* 3.9 [Basore, LCL]). Nevertheless, to be able to withstand challenge did not mean one was indifferent to it. Romans were particularly sensitive to insult; “the hard, stony, brazen face...belonged to the stupid and the shameless.”⁵² Simply to accept insults meant “you lost face. That was serious. You became a Nothing—as even an emperor might.”⁵³ This sensitivity applied to rich and poor alike: “The poor man, according to Juvenal, finds nothing harder to bear than the ridicule directed at the rents and patches on his clothing, the leather splitting on his sandal.”⁵⁴

Shame

Roman shame was both positive and negative, depending on the circumstances. To an extent, one's honor was one and the same as one's shame.⁵⁵ Shame indicated an awareness of and

⁵⁰ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 49, 52.

⁵¹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 48–54, 62–63. Biblical studies scholars have sometimes held that one's honor could only be tested (and thus challenged) by a person's social equals. So consult Malina, *New Testament World* (1981), 30–32. On the contrary, Cassius Dio explains that one might pardon an insult from an emperor, but to pardon insulting treatment from anyone else was considered a sign of weakness (58.5.3–4). For a helpful treatment of inter-status challenges, consult Crook, “Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited,” 599–604.

⁵² Barton, *Roman Honor*, 74, 47. Cf. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire*, 192–93.

⁵³ MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire*, 194.

⁵⁴ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 75. Consult Juvenal, *Sat.* 3.152–53. Cf. Barton, *Roman Honor*, 11: “Emotionally the slave was every bit as sensitive to insult as his or her master.”

⁵⁵ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 200–201; Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 41.

attention to the boundaries between what was fitting and what was not, what was honoring and what was not. In this sense, shame was about inhibition, even if one desired not to be inhibited: showing deference and reverence to others, not speaking of or drawing attention to indecencies, taking care not to break one's commitments, and exhibiting modesty in attitude and action. Hence, the Greek verb *αἰδέομαι* means “to be ashamed,” while the related term *αἰδήμων* means “bashful, modest.”⁵⁶ For a person to feel ashamed indicates the presence or occurrence of something dishonoring, but for a person to tend to that sense of shame can be laudable in itself.⁵⁷ Shame as modesty was laudable, even endearing, as long as it did not make someone weak and afraid to speak one's mind.⁵⁸ Cicero critiques those who, in military and political life, “for fear of giving offence do not dare to express their honest opinion, no matter how excellent” (*Off.* 1.24.84 [Miller, LCL]).⁵⁹

This positive sort of shame, essentially equated with honor, was also a willingness to withstand scrutiny. It could entail enduring measured teasing or jabbing from others but did not mean one was untouched by such circumstances, as the blush indicated.⁶⁰ Once again, there was a degree of respectability in being affected by the scrutiny of others (recall the testing of honor just discussed above)—it revealed a person's awareness of his or her limitations at that same time as it

⁵⁶ “*αἰδέομαι*,” *LSJ*, 35–36; “*αἰδήμων*,” *LSJ*, 36.

⁵⁷ In his *Carmen Saeculare*, Horace praises Augustus for returning the long-neglected values of Good Faith (*Fides*), Peace, Honor (*Honos*), Modesty (*Pudorque*), Virtue (*Virtus*), and Plenty to Rome (57–60). The concept of shame as modesty was also often at play in the early Greek novels. For instance, in *Ninus*, Semiramis is so overcome with shame when asking her aunt Thambe for permission to marry Thambe's son Ninus earlier than generally allowed that she cannot speak. After witnessing Semiramis's struggle for some time, Thambe kindly states, “For me (your silence) speaks more eloquently than any speech” (A4–5 [Sandy]). The novel depicts Semiramis as laudable for being overcome by such shame (and at the same time depicts Ninus positively for his boldness in making the same request to Semiramis's mother). For a treatment of shame and honor in *Ninus*, consult Michael J. Anderson, “The Silence of Semiramis: Shame and Desire in the Ninus Romance and Other Greek Novels,” *AN* 7 (2008): 1–27.

⁵⁸ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 220–21.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, he suggests that this occurs sometimes when people are hyper-concerned to protect their own honor, and he praises one Quintus Maximus for being willing to sacrifice personal fame for the country's wellbeing. Paradoxically, this underscores Quintus Maximus's honor. Quoting Ennius, Cicero states, “Therefore now does his glory (*gloria*) shine bright, and it grows ever brighter.” Cf. Quintilian *Inst.* 12.5.2–3.

⁶⁰ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 211–12, 223–25.

demonstrated concern for honor. In this way, “The person of honor had to be not only sensitive to shame but also willing to suffer it.”⁶¹

Although shame could be about boundaries and inhibition, although it could be equated with honor or at least with concern for one’s honor, in another sense shame was the logical opposite of honor. As such, it indicated *dishonor*. Several Latin terms emphasize this oppositional relationship between shame and honor by affixing a negative prefix to words connoting honor. For example, *infamia* refers to “bad reputation, ill-fame,” to “discredit, disgrace,” or to “a scandalous action, quality, or circumstance, . . . dishonour.”⁶² The same linguistic phenomenon occurs in Greek with the term ἄτιμος, meaning “unhonoured, dishonoured,” or “dishonourable.”⁶³

Negative shame occurred when insult, humiliation, and infamy won the day. While it is true that challenges conferred honor and restrained teasing led to a measured show of positive shame, sometimes the shaming of others was malicious and unrestrained. Whether the shaming act was a rude statement (or a poignantly polite one for that matter), public execution, or anything in between, this sort of shame was about inadequacy. It entailed dehumanization and rejection. “When the contest was too often or too irremediably lost, or when the odds against winning were too enormous or too consistent, tests became *supplicia*, tortures. Instead of invigorating, they debilitated. Instead of confirming, they mutilated the spirit.”⁶⁴ It was possible for being seen to become violation rather than confirmation, to become “toxic shaming,” which took place “any time, any

⁶¹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 221. Cf. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire*, 192–94.

⁶² “*infamia*,” OLD, 893. Similar terms include *dedecus*, *indecor*, *indecenter*, *indignus*, and *ignominia*.

⁶³ “ἄτιμος,” LSJ, 270. Other Greek and Latin terms indicate shame and disgrace on their own, without a negating prefix. The Latin adjective *turpis* refers to something repulsive, disgraceful, degrading, or obscene (“*turpis*,” OLD, 1994). The Greek adjective αἰσχρός means “causing shame, dishonouring, reproachful” (“αἰσχρός,” LSJ, 43).

⁶⁴ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 110, 244–53. For a pertinent example of a shameful public execution, cf. John Granger Cook’s discussion of crucifixion (*Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World*, WUNT 327 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], esp. 418–23).

instant, when one sensed that there was no inhibition in the eyes of others, when the eyes of others would violate and consume.”⁶⁵ It also occurred whenever one person began to “play with” another, not as a full player in a competition but as an “object of sport;” consequently, the shamed person would be rejected by others as well.⁶⁶

Thus, shame could take on a positive and a negative sense, depending on the circumstances. In Latin, the various aspects of shame are well represented by a single term: *pudor*. *Pudor* could mean (1) a feeling of shame, (2) a manifestation of shame (e.g., through blushing), (3) concern for what is appropriate and decent, (4) shyness, (5) honor or self-respect, and (6) a source of dishonor.⁶⁷

Shamelessness

Shamelessness, or the unwillingness to experience shame despite undeniably shameful circumstances, was a maligned but viable response to shame. Cicero states, “Indifference to public opinion implies not merely self-sufficiency [*arrogantis*, or “insolence, arrogance”], but even total lack of principle” (*Off.* 1.28.99 [Miller, LCL]).⁶⁸ Indeed, those who refused to be shamed were often characterized by arrogance and lack of respect for others, sometimes even by hatred for and rage toward others.⁶⁹ The wantonness of shamelessness was also expressed in the Greek term *ἀναιδής* (“shameless”; the term affixes the negative prefix *α-* to the root *αἰδής*, meaning “shame”), which can also mean “ruthless” or “reckless.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Barton, “Being in the Eyes,” 223.

⁶⁶ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 251, 253.

⁶⁷ “*pudor*,” *OLD*, 1514.

⁶⁸ “*arrogantia*,” *OLD*, 174.

⁶⁹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 260–66. Cf. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 96.

⁷⁰ “*ἀναιδής*,” *LSJ*, 105.

Shamelessness Alternatively Defined

Recall that not all persons and groups determined someone honorable in the exact same ways. There was always some variation and possibility for dispute. Sometimes this variation was over relatively small matters, but other times there was an intentional disruption and subversion of relatively commonly held perspectives. This greater discrepancy among what was deemed honorable occurred especially during the period of the empire. During this time, several behaviors that were more typically understood to dishonor were transformed by some into remedies for dishonor.

For example, service was sometimes touted as honorable, especially for those who served the emperors. For some elite, withdrawal from society became associated with *virtus*. That is, instead of actively striving for goodness and honor within societal structures, some chose to live a passive life of non-participatory resistance as a way of seeking *virtus*. At times, those who could not avoid dishonor chose to disassociate the mind from the body. That is, dishonor suffered in the social and physical realm was treated as applying only to the body but not the more essential self. For those who chose to view reality in this way, Reason, Truth, or God became the only determiners of one's honor; however, others might still view them as suffering from dishonor.⁷¹

Yet another tactic for subverting common notions of honor was by embracing that which was otherwise thought foolish: becoming hardened to humiliation and pain. Impenetrable by slander and other attacks on honor, a good person needed not fortune, favor, or success. This attitude of shamelessness flourished especially among certain groups, namely Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics.⁷² Of course, being hardened to certain situations often deemed shameful did not mean that adherents to these groups rejected the concepts of honor and shame altogether.

⁷¹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 115–16, 122–26.

⁷² Barton, *Roman Honor*, 116–19.

A prime example of this is the teaching of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who commends being impenetrable to insults as he discusses honor, shame, and shamelessness. He distinguishes between appearances and deeper realities of the world, claiming that one should not strive for public esteem or the approval of others. When one is insulted through speech or action, it is only truly insult if the recipient is bothered by it. Therefore, a person must not allow the appearance of insult to affect that person's temperament (*Ench.* 20).⁷³ He states, “But are you not ashamed [*αἰσχύνῃ*] that you turn over your own faculty of judgment to whoever happens along, so that if he abuses you it is upset and confused?” (*Ench.* 28 [White]).⁷⁴ Relatedly, one need not worry about what it will cost socially to avoid participating in the prevailing system of honor-exchange:

Do not be weighed down by the consideration, “I shall live without any honor [*ἄτιμος*], everywhere a nobody!” For if lack of honors [*ἀτιμία*] is something bad, I cannot be in a bad state because of another person any more than I can be in a shameful [*αἰσχροῦ*] one. It is not your task to gain political office, or be invited to a banquet, is it? Not at all. How then is that a lack of honor [*ἀτιμία*]? And how will you be a nobody everywhere, if you need to be a somebody only in things that are up to you—in which it is open to you to be of the greatest worth [*πλείστου ἀξίῳ*]?” (24 [White]; 24.1–2, LCL)

True honor is not determined by external or popular accomplishments; it is determined by one's internal attitude about the world (accepting the way things are with tranquility) and in doing one's best to live out one's lot well. For instance, Epictetus teaches that when a person is at a banquet, he should partake of the food whenever it is his turn, not before or after. He should also have this same attitude in all areas of life, making him “fit to share a banquet with the gods” (15 [White]).⁷⁵

⁷³ Section numbers correspond to Epictetus, *The Handbook (The Encheiridion)*, trans. Nicholas White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), except where noted by “LCL.” Greek terms are drawn from the LCL edition.

⁷⁴ Philosophers had their limits in the application of this notion, however. For instance, Seneca tells the story of a king who recklessly and heartlessly kills the son of one of his servants in full view of that servant. Although the servant's impenetrable calmness serves the point he is trying to promote, Seneca cannot contain his dissatisfaction with the story's end. He curses the father who was so devoted to this philosophy that he chose to live with no discernible response instead of having the king kill him in his sorrow (*Ira* 3.14.3–4).

⁷⁵ If he takes it one step further and renounces such things when they are offered to him, he becomes “a ruler along with them [the gods]” (15). Epictetus also associates honor with *εὐσέβεια* (31), “reverence towards the gods or parents, piety or filial respect.” “*εὐσέβεια*,” *LSJ*, 731.

If one does try to gain public honor, he should not compromise his modesty (*αἰδήμονα*) or faithfulness (*πιστὸν*) or high-mindedness (*μεγαλόφρονα*) (24.3, LCL). Indeed, the only “place” in society and politics for which one should strive is the place that does not require one to compromise these things. Otherwise, “what use will you be to it [the city] if you turn out shameless [*ἀναιδής*] and untrustworthy?” (24 [White]; 24.4–5, LCL). In encouraging people not to live shamelessly, Epictetus rejects a *particular system* of honor, which focuses on honor in terms of positions of prominence and public recognition, but he does not reject the idea that a person should live honorably.

Conclusion

Though variously defined, Roman honor was about public distinction that took into account one’s reputation, character, and modesty. It mattered to and could be conferred by people of all levels of society. Likewise, one’s honor could be challenged by people of all sorts. Challenges to one’s honor presented opportunities for that honor to be strengthened by withstanding the test at hand. To an extent, there was a positive correlation between the degree of the test and the degree of honor earned. Nonetheless, it was also possible for insult and humiliation to overcome the one challenged and consequently to tear down one’s honor rather than bolster it, leading to an experience of negative shame. In such circumstances, it was not uncommon—especially among certain groups—for the shamed person to embrace shamelessness in order to preserve her or his honor. With this general framework in mind for first-century Roman notions of honor, I now turn to an analysis of the Gospel of Mark itself.

CHAPTER 4

HONOR ON THE RISE: MARK 1:1–8:26

From 1:1 to 8:26, the Gospel of Mark overwhelmingly features Jesus’s honor. Jesus is hailed in both divine and imperial terms and hosts the divine. He gains fame and repeatedly impresses. He serves as a generous benefactor. He controls nature. He interprets the Jewish scriptures authoritatively. He withstands scrutiny and puts antagonistic opponents in their place. He is also a man of virtue who is godly and modest, and he does not insist on touting his own deeds or status. In Barton’s terms, Jesus is portrayed as having an illustrious *persona*, which is “composed of the reputation (*existimatio*, *fama*, and *nomen*), supported by effective energy (*virtus*), and enforced by a sensitivity to shame (*pudor*).”¹ The effect of Jesus’s continued and consistent displays of greatness is the building of his honor on the story and discourse levels of Mark 1:1–8:26.

Honor Established

Mark’s Gospel opens with a tongue twister: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ], meaning, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God.” The last two words, υἱοῦ θεοῦ, are placed in brackets in the NA²⁸ due to discrepancies in the manuscript evidence. While there is strong evidence for υἱοῦ θεοῦ (sometimes rendered υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ), several valuable manuscripts lack the phrase. It is sometimes argued that the phrase “son of God” was original in Mark 1:1 and was overlooked during scribal transmission due to *homoioteleuton*, or the repetition of similar phrases or word endings. In this case, it would be the occurrence of six genitive singular endings (ου) in a row,

¹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 57.

further complicated by use of the *nomina sacra* (scribal abbreviation of sacred names) ΙΥ ΧΥ ΥΥ ΘΥ.²

Adela Yarbro Collins assesses, however, that “the shorter reading has early, extensive, and independent attestation,” and she contends that “it is easier to understand why some copyists would add this phrase than why some would omit it.”³ Similarly, Peter Head finds the manuscript evidence, while strong for both (or all three) readings, to be in support of the shorter reading. Head argues both that sacred terms would likely have been treated with great care and that a scribal oversight due to fatigue is highly unlikely at the start of a work.⁴ Like Collins and Head, many scholars hold that υἱοῦ θεοῦ is a later addition to Mark 1:1.

If original to Mark’s Gospel, υἱοῦ θεοῦ would signal the importance of honor from the very first line of the work. For Jews, Greeks, and Romans, this phrase had marked political connotations that associated a human ruler with the divine, affording that ruler a degree of status that was not easily available to other humans. In the Jewish tradition, passages such as Ps 2, in which God’s anointed (2:2) is declared “my [i.e., God’s] son” (2:7), emphasize that “the fundamental and central concept of Israelite royal ideology was that the king of Israel was a superhuman, divine being.”⁵ In the Greek tradition, “kings and other rulers were consistently portrayed as descended from gods or as ‘son of god’” or son of a specific god.⁶ In the Roman tradition, “son of (a) god” was used for

² Craig A. Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *JGRChJ*, vol. 1, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Matthew Brook O’Donnell, and Wendy J. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004), 67–81, esp. 67.

³ Collins, *Mark*, 130na. For a more in-depth treatment of this issue, consult Adela Yarbro Collins, “Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1,” in *Texts and Contexts: The Function of Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts*, ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 111–27.

⁴ Peter M. Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1: ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” *NTS* 37 (1991): 621–29. Interestingly, Head suggests that υἱοῦ θεοῦ was added to Mark ca. 100 CE. As such, within a generation, some audiences of Mark may have encountered this feature of the text.

⁵ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Jews,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 393–408, esp. 394.

⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans,” *HTR* 93 (2000): 85–100, esp. 87.

multiple emperors. Augustus was referred to using υἱὸς θεοῦ or *divi filius* in several inscriptions and papyri. In fact, from 27 BCE onward, Greek documents recorded Augustus's official name as including υἱὸς θεοῦ.⁷ This appellation occurred in literary representations of Augustus as well. The poet Virgil writes of him:

Now turn your two eyes here, to look upon
your Romans, your own people. Here is Caesar
and all the line of Iūlus that will come
beneath the mighty curve of heaven. This,
this is the man you heard so often promised—
Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will
renew a golden age in Latium. (*Aen.* 6.1044–50 [Mandelbaum]; 6.788–793, LCL)

Augustus was not the only Roman emperor afforded the title “son of god.” Tiberius was variously referred to as both υἱὸς θεοῦ and *divi filius*.⁸ An Athenian inscription refers to Caligula as “son of Augustus, a new Ares,” while another inscription from Athens designates him “son of Ares.”⁹ Nero is once referred to as “the son of the greatest of the gods.”¹⁰

In Jewish, Greek, and Roman contexts, use of “son of god” language (and in Greek and Roman contexts, divine language more generally) blurred lines between humans and the divine. In the Roman imperial context, such blurring of lines was at least an attempt to account for the high degree of honor granted to emperors. As Lendon explains, “Divine honours are represented as the solution to a quandary: what is to be done when conventional honours are inadequate to the emperor’s merits? When the deference and gratitude due him are so overwhelming? Only the best

⁷ Collins, “Son of God among Greeks and Romans,” 94–96; Collins also discusses the distinct yet overlapping meanings of υἱὸς θεοῦ and *divi filius*. Consult also Evans, “Mark’s Incipit,” 69–70. References to Augustus as υἱὸς θεοῦ or *divi filius* include IGR 1.901; 4.309, 315; ILS 107, 113; P.Ryl. 601; P.Oslo 26.

⁸ Collins, “Son of God among Greeks and Romans,” 95.

⁹ CIA 3.444, 3.444a. For these citations and a more complete list of related titles for these emperors, consult Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 34b of WBC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), lxxxii–lxxxiii.

¹⁰ IM 157b. So consult Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, lxxxiii.

will do.”¹¹ Nicolaus of Damascus captures this link between honor and divine associations or cult: “Since men call him [Augustus] thus in proportion to his degree of honour, they revere him with temples and sacrifices on the islands and continents, distributed through the cities and provinces. Thus they repay the greatness of his virtue and his benefactions to them.”¹²

Upon encountering divine-son language in Mark 1:1, avers Peter Bolt, “Graeco-Roman readers would immediately connect Mark’s opening line with...imperial propaganda. The oddity would be that it referred to someone other than a member of the imperial line.”¹³ However far out of typical context a reference to Jesus as υἱὸς θεοῦ would be, by signaling language of the imperial cult, such a reference would liken Jesus to rulers—and especially to Roman emperors in a first-century imperial context—and, further, to the divine. Both associations convey Jesus’s power, authority, and special status in relation to humans and gods (or God).

Even without υἱοῦ θεοῦ, however, Mark 1:1 still serves to establish Jesus’s high honor both by referring to him as the messiah of Israel and by inviting comparison between Jesus and Roman emperors.¹⁴ Craig Evans has demonstrated that 1:1 otherwise employs language used in the Roman ruler cult. Namely, Mark 1:1 echoes the Priene Calendar Inscription written in honor of Caesar Augustus, which reads in part: “the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning [ἡρξεν] of the good tidings [εὐανγέλιον] for the world that came by reason of him.”¹⁵ This inscription celebrates

¹¹ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 164.

¹² Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 163, quoting Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGH* 90 F 125. Lucian (*Apologia* 13) and Philo (*Embassy* 140–52) draw the same connections between the imperial cult and honor.

¹³ Peter Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark’s Early Readers*, SNTSMS 125 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.

¹⁴ The attribution of “messiah” to Jesus imparts him with the status of a divinely ordained, Davidic ruler. While this is a particularly Jewish status designation, it could still reinforce Jesus’s status to any in the wider Greco-Roman culture familiar with the term.

¹⁵ Evans, “Mark’s Incipit,” 69. *OGIS* 458.40–42. Evans draws a third point of comparison between Mark 1:1 and the Priene inscription: in both instances the good news is engendered by an agent given divine status (Jesus: υἱὸς θεοῦ; Augustus: savior, benefactor, θεός). Evans’s third point of comparison does not come into play *for 1:1* when υἱοῦ

“the divine Caesar’s advent and rule” as “the beginning of a new political order.”¹⁶ What is more, the term εὐαγγέλιον was sometimes associated with Roman emperors in other contexts as well, such as Vespasian’s victories in war and accession to the throne.¹⁷ By opening the Gospel using language reminiscent of the Roman imperial cult, Mark draws a connection between Jesus and Roman emperors by employing language otherwise used to honor, and sometimes offer divine honors for, the rule, accomplishments, and benefaction of such emperors.

From the opening line of Mark, then, Jesus is depicted in high-status terms. This sentiment continues throughout Mark’s introduction.¹⁸ After the incipit, John the Baptist is introduced as Jesus’s predecessor (1:2–8). Jesus’s greatness is proclaimed to the public when John, the first character to mention Jesus, declares openly in 1:7 that Jesus is “stronger” (ισχυρότερός) than himself and describes himself as not “sufficient” (ἰκανός) to untie even the strap of Jesus’s sandal. As it can mean “a match for” or “equivalent to,” ἰκανός elicits comparison.¹⁹ John is suggesting, then, that Jesus is more estimable than he. For John, the immediate application of this sentiment relates to the revivalist activity of Jesus and access to the divine: while John calls people to spiritual renewal via the ritual act of baptism, Jesus will call people to spiritual renewal via the “baptism” of the Spirit of God (1:8). Through his public statement, John confers honor upon Jesus. This is clear especially when considered in terms of Roman honor: “When one man honoured another in the Roman world, he

θεοῦ is deemed a later addition, although the comparison is fair enough when considering the Gospel as a whole. Cf. n23 of this chapter.

¹⁶ Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, LNTS 340 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 92.

¹⁷ Evans, “Mark’s Incipit,” 70.

¹⁸ The parameters of Mark’s introduction are debated, with 1:14 and 1:16 variously said to mark the end of the introduction. Either way, 1:11 is part of Mark’s introduction. For a discussion of the boundaries of Mark’s introduction, consult Joanna Dewey, “Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecast and Echoes for a Listening Audience,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 221–36, esp. 221–22, 225–26.

¹⁹ “ἰκανός,” *LSJ*, 825.

granted him a quantum of honour,” which then led the larger community to confer honor as well, as long as the one bestowing honor was “sufficiently distinguished himself.”²⁰ We learn in 1:5 that John the Baptist is widely respected in Jerusalem and all Judea.

In 1:9, immediately after John evokes the concept of baptism, Mark depicts Jesus going to John to be baptized in the Jordan.²¹ The scene focuses on the final moments of the baptismal act. As Jesus comes up from the water, the heavens are torn open (σχιζομένους), the Spirit of God descends upon Jesus, and, in a statement seemingly accessible only to Jesus and the narrative audience, God declares Jesus to be “my beloved son” (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός). Thus, the baptismal scene brings the issue of υἱός θεοῦ full circle. While the phrase may be taken out of consideration for 1:1, Jesus’s divine sonship comes into play nonetheless in 1:11, still part of Mark’s introduction. Not only does ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός portray Jesus in terms familiar to the Roman imperial cult, but also, in being spoken by God’s own self, these words leave no doubt that Jesus is deserving of such divine honor.²² This has the further effect of highlighting Jesus’s honor even beyond that of Roman emperors. Evans makes a similar point when he states that Mark “is making the claim that the good news of Jesus Christ is genuine. Neither Julius Caesar nor any one of his descendants can rightly be regarded as the ‘son of God’; only Jesus the Messiah.”²³ Such a comparison is further emphasized

²⁰ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 48–49, esp. 48. Lendon is discussing aristocratic honor and the aristocratic community in particular, but as Barton has demonstrated, honor functioned similarly among non-aristocrats, and thus the principle applies more broadly. Someone with a positive reputation could bestow honor on others. Cf. Barton, *Roman Honor*, 11–13.

²¹ Jesus’s superiority to John almost seems to be challenged by Jesus’s decision to go to John for baptism; however, the scene underscores John’s sentiment: Jesus has a special status that, apparently, John does not.

²² It also alludes to Israelite royal ideology. Cf. Collins, “Son of God Among Jews,” 394.

²³ Evans, “Mark’s Incipit,” 70. Although at this point, Evans is focused on Mark’s incipit, his statement can be applied more broadly, as he elsewhere asserts that, even if “son of God” is not original to Mark 1:1, “nothing of Mark’s Christology is lost” (68; cf. 73).

when one notes that omens similar to what occurs at Jesus's baptism (e.g., birds, divine appearances in dreams) were often associated with an emperor's accession or death.²⁴

Both Evans and Winn, who also utilizes Evans's argument, posit a connection between Mark's opening and Roman imperial honors, while both also note that Mark's citation of Isa 40:3 claims that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish hopes. Asking why Mark would draw upon Roman imperial cult language to promote Jesus, Winn and Evans have different answers. Evans holds that Mark was written ca. 68–69 CE during a period of rapid imperial turnover and political instability for Romans and Jews, and when none of the most recent emperors had been (lastingly) afforded the honor of deification. Mark's move offers hope that Jesus is the true leader deserving honor rather than any Roman emperor.²⁵ Winn understands Mark to have a similar motive but in a slightly different context: the wake of the destruction of the temple under Vespasian, when Flavian propaganda was in full force and potentially undermining to the Jesus movement. For Winn, contra *Vespasian's* propaganda, Mark types Jesus as world ruler and fulfillment of Jewish prophecy.²⁶ Both Winn and Evans posit plausible scenarios, and there is no real need to choose between them or be as specific as either. For audiences familiar with Roman imperial-cultic sentiments, the comparison of Jesus to Roman emperors would be clear and meaningful.

Altogether, the presentation of Jesus in Mark's introduction situates Jesus as a figure of high honor, to be esteemed as even greater than a well-known and well-liked prophet. He is portrayed as a man who not only has access to the divine but also can be spoken of in divine terms. In fact, the very divine term (υἱὸς θεοῦ) applied to Jesus is also used for Roman emperors as a means of showing

²⁴ Evans, "Mark's Incipit," 70–71.

²⁵ Evans, "Mark's Incipit," 78–81.

²⁶ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, esp. 39–49, 53–54, 69–73.

exceptional honor. What is more, Jesus receives the honor of being called υἱὸς θεοῦ not by other humans (assuming that 1:1 is not original) but by God's own self.

Audience Versus Characters

Already, in establishing Jesus's honor, Mark's introduction highlights the need to distinguish between the Gospel's story level and its discourse level. The story level includes, among other features, the interaction of characters that plays out in the plot. The discourse level relates to the rhetorical impact of the story on its audience that results from the way the story is told.²⁷

The establishment of Jesus's honor at the start of Mark is experienced differently by the narrative's characters than by the narrative audience. As participants in the story, most characters are not automatically privy to events that happen in their absence, and none are aware of the framing of the narrative by Mark's narrator.²⁸ The narrative audience witnesses, however, all interactions, all narrated thoughts and speech, and everything else articulated by the narrator. In other words, the narrative audience has access to the implied author's discourse, while the characters do not.²⁹ Since the narrative audience knows more than individual characters, the audience does not at every point assess Jesus's honor using the same data that characters in the story have at their disposal.

For instance, no characters in Mark's Gospel are cognizant of the opening line of the Gospel, nor do they seem to witness the divine declaration that Jesus is "my beloved son" in 1:11. Nonetheless, some public group does witness John's praise of the one "coming after" him (1:7). Therefore, both a subset of the narrative's characters and its audience can attest to Jesus's honor

²⁷ Malbon, "Narrative Criticism," 32. As noted previously, in discussing discourse and story, Malbon is drawing from the work of Chatman, *Story and Discourse*.

²⁸ What God's character knows is somewhat ambiguous, although divine omniscience is likely implied. Jesus is nearly omniscient.

²⁹ On the other hand, one could argue that the characters have the advantage of experiencing their interactions first-hand and may hold knowledge not readily available to the narrative audience.

from early on in the narrative, but the narrative audience is more likely to find allusions to rulers and the imperial cult in the portrayal of Jesus. The perception of Jesus as divine or associated with the divine as well as the perception of Jesus as a powerful ruler *do* occur to various characters at points throughout the narrative. Additionally, at points, it may be possible for certain characters to draw associations between Jesus and Roman emperors (at least one character, the Roman centurion, does implicitly make such a connection; cf. 15:39).³⁰ On the whole, however, characters in the story, in experiencing, affirming, and contributing to Jesus's growing honor, likely do not bring as robust a repertoire of associations to their assessment of Jesus's status and honor.

These distinctions recognized, as the Gospel narrative continues through Mark 8:26, Jesus's honor builds on both the story level and the narrative level. In the analysis to follow, I address the disparity between the audience and the characters' perception of Jesus's honor as needed.

Gaining Momentum

Having established Jesus's honor from the start, Mark next describes its growth. Through the first half of the Gospel, Jesus is portrayed in powerful terms and is overwhelmingly accepted and admired wherever he goes. In particular, on the story level, his honor increases among the general public and is demonstrated among smaller groups, including suppliants, unclean spirits, and his disciples.

With the Public

From John's proclamation about Jesus in 1:7 until 8:27, which begins Jesus's conversation with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus's ministry is characterized by growing public esteem. Jesus may not represent the established elite, and neither does he hold any religious or political

³⁰ This is especially the case in light of the fact that Jesus is proclaiming a kingdom, the kingdom of God, which can be contrasted with that of the Romans. Cf. Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 42.

offices, but once his ministry begins in 1:14–15, Jesus quickly gains fame and renown, which often precede him, among the general public for his good, powerful deeds of benefaction (he heals, exorcizes, and provides) and his authoritative, virtuous teaching. In short, throughout Mark 1–8, Jesus gains public honor.

This is evident from the first exorcism Jesus performs in the Gospel (1:21–28). The scene is bookended with references to both Jesus’s authoritative teaching and the crowd’s amazement. As the scene opens, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum and astonishing (ἐξεπλήσσοντο) his audience, “for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes” (1:22). After Jesus performs the exorcism, the notion of his authoritative teaching is underscored once again: “And all were astounded (ἐθαμβήθησαν), and they discussed with one another, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He even commands the unclean spirits, and they obey him!’” (1:27).³¹ The chatter does not stop with those present at the synagogue, as “immediately news (ἀκοή) of him spread everywhere into the whole region of Galilee” (1:28). Some English translations render ἀκοή as “fame” (e.g., NRSV, ESV), although the word tends to take on a more modest, if typically positive or neutral, connotation. Nonetheless, the translation choice is understandable given the response of the crowd at the synagogue and the behavior of the masses in the following scenes. That is, the registered amazement of the crowd in 1:27 and their attestation to Jesus’s commanding authority among both humans and spirits combines with people flocking to Jesus throughout the remainder of Mark 1 to produce positive momentum for Jesus’s public esteem. His fame *is* spreading.

³¹ It is common practice in English translations to omit the καί (“and”) that occurs so often at the beginning of clauses throughout Mark; however, I often choose to retain it to remain closer to the Greek and because, at times, it underscores the continuous nature of the material it introduces in relation to what has already occurred. So consult Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 1–8: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT, ed. Martin M. Culy (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), xxvi–xxvii; Stephanie L. Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew: καί, δε, τότε, γάρ, οὖν and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse*, JSNTSup, SNTG 9 (London: Sheffield, 2002).

Consider 1:32–34, in which “the whole city” surrounds Jesus to witness his healings and exorcisms. In the very next scene (1:35–39), it is reported to Jesus that “all”—presumably the inhabitants of Capernaum—“are seeking you,” (1:37) in order, it would seem, to witness or experience Jesus’s great teaching and deeds, which he then carries out throughout Galilee. Then, the very next scene (1:40–45) also depicts Jesus’s fame spreading. After he heals a man of leprosy, the man, who had asked for healing by saying to Jesus, “If you are willing, you are able to cleanse me” (1:40), spreads the word about what Jesus has done. The popular attention Jesus receives as a consequence is such that he can no longer be seen publicly.³² He stays out in the desert, though this does not stop people from coming “to him from everywhere” (1:45).

The fame Jesus experiences from the start of Mark has parallels with the beginnings of the early Greek novels, literary works also from the early Roman imperial period that share several similarities with the Gospels.³³ Habrocomes, the male protagonist of *An Ephesian Tale*, is introduced

³² I treat Jesus’s command to the man later in this chapter, in the section titled “Jesus and the ‘Secret.’”

³³ The dates of the early Greek novels are debated, but Ewen Bowie argues that *Callirhoe* and *Ephesian Tale* were written ca. 50–70 CE (“The Chronology of the Earlier Greek Novels Since B.E. Perry: Revisions and Precisions,” *AN* 2 [2002]: 47–63).

Similarities with the Gospels include: the empty tomb motif (Andy M. Reimer, “A Biography of a Motif: The Empty Tomb in the Gospels, the Greek Novels, and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*,” in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*, ed. Jo-Ann Brant, Charles W. Hedrick, and Chris Shea, *SBLSymS* 32 [Atlanta: SBL, 2005], 297–316); portrayals of spectacle combined with an interest in “myth, heroic legend, historical and geographical data, and scientific information” informed by an imperial context (Gerhard van den Heever, “Novel and Mystery: Discourse, Myth, and Society,” in Brant, Hedrick, and Shea, *Ancient Fiction*, 89–114, esp. 104; Van den Heever specifically discusses the novels and also helpfully traces the history of scholarship regarding the Greek novel and myth, including the seminal work of Reinhold Merkelbach: *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* [Munich: Beck, 1962]); protagonists who suffer passively as victims of violence (for a treatment of these features in the novels, consult Marília P. Futre Pinheiro, “Myths in the Novel: Gender, Violence and Power,” in *Intende, Lector—Echoes of Myth, Religion and Ritual in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Marília P. Futre Pinheiro, Anton Bierl, and Roger Beck, *MEP* 6 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013], 28–35). Additionally, as I discuss in ch. 5, the Gospels and the novels share similar plot trajectories vis-à-vis honor and shame. I am not claiming that the Greek novels and the Gospels are the same genre or even, as Michael Vines argues, that the Gospels are novels, only Jewish rather than Greek (*The Problem of Markan Genre: The Gospel of Mark and the Jewish Novel*, *SBL AcBib* 3 [Leiden: Brill, 2002]). While perhaps the Gospels and the Greek novels had similar popular audiences (per Vines, *Problem of Markan Genre*; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*; Tomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], esp. 90), the popular audience of the Greek novels and the overlap of the novel and Gospel audiences have been questioned (Susan A. Stephen, “Who Read Ancient Novels?” *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, ed. James Tatum [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994], 405–18; Ewen Bowie, “The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World,” in Tatum, *Search for the Ancient Novel*, 435–59). One need not argue either of those points to make the more general observation that the Greek novels are a useful and appropriate point of comparison for analyzing Mark, in line with Ronald F. Hock, “The Greek Novel,” in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, ed. David

as belonging to an illustrious family, phenomenally attractive, cultured, and skilled. As a result, “Everyone in Ephesus sought his company, and in the rest of Asia as well....They treated the boy like a god” (1.1 [Anderson]).³⁴ In *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, the female protagonist Callirhoe is introduced as being similarly sought after:

She was a wonderful girl, the pride of all Sicily; her beauty was more than human, it was divine [θεῖον], and it was not the beauty of a Nereid or mountain nymph at that, but of the maiden Aphrodite herself. Report [φήμη] of the astonishing vision spread everywhere, and suitors flocked to Syracuse, rulers and tyrants’ sons, not just from Sicily but from southern Italy too and father north, and from foreigners in those parts. (1.1 [Reardon]; 1.1.2, LCL)³⁵

Both Habrocomes and Callirhoe are famed because of their spectacular and estimable characteristics, and in both narratives, the fact of their fame is used to establish their honor. Mark, whose narrative is also written in Rome’s early imperial period, employs this same technique in his narrative of a different genre. In Mark, although Jesus is famed for much different reasons than either Habrocomes or Callirhoe, he also experiences fame far and wide. Here, too, the fame Jesus experiences is a testament to his growing honor and also serves to reinforce it.

The trajectory of Jesus’s growing fame among the masses, which is highlighted in Table 1, continues throughout Mark 2–8. Repeatedly, Jesus draws large crowds. Most often, the crowds are referred to as ὄχλος—which means, precisely, “crowd”—and at times the size of the crowd is qualified as great (πολύς) or very great (πλεῖστος). In the two miraculous feeding episodes of Mark 6 and 8, the crowd is further specified to be “five thousand men” and “four thousand,” respectively; in each case, it is possible that women and children are present but not included in the count.³⁶ The

E. Aune, SBLBS 21 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 127–46; Hock, “Why New Testament Scholars Should Read Ancient Novels,” in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins, SBLSymS 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 121–38.

³⁴ Citations of *Ephesian Tale* correspond to Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*, trans. Graham Anderson, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 128–69.

³⁵ Citations of *Callirhoe* correspond to Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, trans. B. P. Reardon, in Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 21–124. Where Greek is referenced, the LCL citation is noted and is indicated by “LCL.”

scene in Mark 3:7–12 features one “great multitude” (πολὺ πλῆθος) from Galilee and another (πλῆθος πολὺ) from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, the region across the Jordan, and the region surrounding Tyre and Sidon. Recall that in 1:32–34 it is “the whole city” of Capernaum that is said to come to Jesus. A few passages indicate a crowd using the less specific language “many” (πολλοί) or “all” (ἅπαντες; πάντες), and still others indicate a crowd through the ambiguous “they” included in the third-person plural verb form.³⁷ Once, in 7:24–25, the crowd is not explicitly identified per se, but the passage communicates that, despite his efforts, Jesus is unable to “escape notice.”

Crowds sometimes flock to Jesus even when he seeks solitude, as in 6:31–34, and they sometimes linger for an entire evening (6:35) or longer (8:2). They are often described as gathering around Jesus. On several occasions their efforts to be physically close to him are quite intense. As previously noted, in 1:45 the crowd’s efforts to come to Jesus necessitate that he limit his public movements. Then, in 3:9 Jesus has to leave the crowd quickly in a boat to avoid being crushed by them (ἵνα μὴ θλίβωσιν αὐτόν), since those with diseases are falling upon (ἐπιπίπτειν) him so that, by touching him, they will be healed.³⁸ In 3:20 a crowd gathers around Jesus to the point that he and his disciples are not able to eat (although Jesus is in the same setting in 3:32, and here the crowd is

³⁶ Mark 6:44 states that πεντακισχίλιοι ἄνδρες were there, whereas Mark 8:9 indicates that τετρακισχίλιοι were there. In 6:44 it is not clear whether no women and children are present or whether the women and children are not counted. Cf. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 414. In 8:9 the women and children could be included in the four thousand or not counted here either.

³⁷ Decker identifies the verb forms in these (and other) Markan passages as “indefinite plurals,” used to refer loosely to some sort of group. Consult Decker, *Mark 1–8*, xxv–xxvi, 25–26.

³⁸ In 4:1 Jesus teaches from a boat due to the size of the crowd, although it is unclear what it is about the crowd’s size that makes the boat preferable. It is not clear whether Jesus is teaching to the same crowd from 4:1 until 4:36. Although he seems to leave the crowd in 4:10, the crowd comes back into play later, probably at 4:20.

Table 1: Jesus and Crowds in Mark 1:21–8:26

Passage	Crowd Identifiers	Crowd's Initial Behavior	Jesus's Actions	Crowd's Response
1:21–28	They; all (ἅπαντες)		Teaches with authority; exorcises unclean spirit	Astounded (ἐξεπλήσσοντο; ἐθαμβήθησαν)
1:32–34	The whole city (ὅλη ἡ πόλις)	Is gathered together at door	Heals many, exorcises many demons	
1:35–39	All (πάντες)	Seek Jesus	Goes instead through Galilee preaching, exorcising demons	
1:40–45	They		Jesus privately heals a leprous man	Come to Jesus from everywhere
2:1–12	Many (πολλοί); crowd (τὸν ὄχλον)	Gathers together, fills up house	Teaches; heals, forgives paralyzed man; perceives scribes' questions	Amazed (ἐξίστασθαι) and glorifies God
2:13	The whole crowd (πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος)	Gathers around Jesus	Teaches	
2:18–22	They	Ask why Jesus's disciples do not fast	Teaches	
3:7–12	Great multitude (πολὺ πλῆθος; πολὺ πλῆθος)	Follows, comes to Jesus	Heals many; leaves quickly by boat	The diseased fall upon him (ἐπιπίπτειν) for healing
3:20–21, 31–35	Crowd (ὄχλος)	1. Gathers together 2. Sits around Jesus	1. (Unable to eat) 2. Teaches	
4:1–9, 21–36	Very large crowd (ὄχλος πλείστος)	Gathers around Jesus	Teaches from a boat	
5:1–20	1. They 2. All (πάντες)	1. Come to Jesus 2. Hear message from healed man	(Just healed the man with the legion)	1. Afraid, beg Jesus to leave 2. Marvel (ἐθαύμαζον)
5:21–34	Great crowd (ὄχλος πολὺς)	Gathers around, presses on Jesus	Heals hemorrhaging woman	
6:1–6	Many (πολλοί)		Teaches; later, unable to do many miracles	Astounded (ἐξεπλήσσοντο); take offense (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο)
6:30–44	Many (πολλοί); great crowd (πολὺν ὄχλον); five thousand men	Hurries ahead of Jesus to meet him	Teaches; multiplies loaves and fish	
6:53–56	They	Recognize Jesus; rush to bring sick; beg to touch	Heals many	
7:14–15	Crowd (τὸν ὄχλον)		Teaches regarding defilement	
7:24–25	Tyrian people generally	Notice Jesus		
7:31–37	They; the crowd (τοῦ ὄχλου)	Begs Jesus to touch deaf man	Heals man (privately)	Exceedingly astounded (ὕπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο), say Jesus “has done everything well” (καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν)
8:1–10	Great crowd (πολλοῦ ὄχλου); four thousand	With Jesus three days	Multiplies loaves and fish	
8:22–26	They	Bring blind man	Heals man (privately)	

much calmer, sitting around him).³⁹ The crowds of 5:24 and 5:31 are said to “press upon” him (συνέθλιβον; συνθλίβοντά; from συνθλίβω, literally meaning “compress”).⁴⁰ Then, in 6:53–56, those at Gennesaret who recognize Jesus “run around the whole country” to bring their sick and beg Jesus to let them touch the fringe of his cloak for healing.⁴¹ Sometimes, the crowd’s intensity may reflect enthusiasm for Jesus; other times, it seems to be borne out of need.

In fact, repeatedly crowds come to Jesus not just because he is well known and draws attention but because they need him in some way.⁴² They come to sit under Jesus’s teaching, to bring

³⁹ After this crowd gathers around Jesus in 3:20, the scene takes an unexpected turn. Mark 3:21 reads: καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν· ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη. The NRSV translates the verse: “When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’” This translation suggests that the crowd negatively assesses Jesus. It assumes, however, that the unspecified subject (“they”) of ἔλεγον is the crowd, when οἱ παρ’ αὐτοῦ is clearly the subject of the previous clause, and ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη better explains the family’s behavior than the crowd’s. This is especially the case when the literary context is considered. Mark 3:20–21 forms the first half of a “Markan sandwich” that frames the negative conversation Jesus has with the scribes in 3:22–30 (treated in the “Gaining Opposition” section of this chapter). In 3:31–35, Jesus’s family arrives to get him, continuing the scene from 3:20–21. The crowd, now sitting calmly around Jesus, alerts him to his family’s arrival, which prompts a teaching moment in which Jesus redefines his family as any who does “the will of God.” For others who read Jesus’s family as the intended subject of ἔλεγον, cf. Decker, *Mark* 1–8, 80–81; Collins, *Mark*, 225–27; John Dominic Crossan, “Mark and the Relatives of Jesus,” *NovT* 15 (1973): 81–113, esp. 85–87; Susan Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel*, LNTSSup 259 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 31–38. Contra Crossan, Miller reads the story as if Jesus’s relatives act out of concern for him, even if they do not fully understand his mission. It is possible to go even further than Miller and adopt a more generous reading of 3:21, which can be translated as, “And hearing, his family came out to get him, for they were saying, ‘He is beside himself (ἐξέστη).’” In this case, κρατῆσαι does not have a negative connotation but a positive, protective one (positive connotations for κρατέω occur in 5:41, 9:27). Here, ἐξέστη implies that Jesus is behaving atypically, perhaps agitatedly, because the crowd is now so intense that he and his disciples cannot meet their own basic needs. This translation allows that Jesus’s family acts to help him during a moment of frustration. Most importantly, though, even if Jesus’s family is understood to question Jesus’s sanity and undercut his ministry (with good intentions or not) in 3:21, the scene still underscores Jesus’s public momentum: in a situation in which his legitimacy is publicly called into question, Jesus redefines his family and associates himself and any who follow him with the will of God (3:35).

⁴⁰ “συνθλίβω,” *LSJ*, 1717.

⁴¹ Grammatically, it is unclear whether the sick beg to touch Jesus or those who bring the sick beg Jesus to let the sick touch him. Regardless, the effect is the same.

⁴² Ahn Byung-Mu has argued that Mark’s crowds, not exclusively but frequently referred to as ὄχλος from ch. 2 forward, represent a particular, if fluid, social class of marginalized or abandoned people (*minjung*) who are contrasted with the ruling elite (though they are not simply the poor). The ὄχλος is characterized by yearning but is not unified into a single movement or circumstance. Ahn Byung-Mu, “Jesus and the Minjung in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, ed. Yong Bock Kim (Singapore: CTCCA, 1981), 136–51. Similarly, David Joy has argued that the ὄχλος who follows Jesus throughout Mark is comprised of liminal people who could not accept the political and religious program of the Jerusalem authorities. David Joy, “Markan Subalterns/The Crowd and Their Strategies of Resistance: A Postcolonial Critique,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 2 (2005): 55–74. It is clear that in Mark the crowds are distinguished from certain prominent religious groups/leaders, and these crowds seem *not* to represent the elite. This is not exclusively true, however, as is suggested by the emergence of Jairus the synagogue leader from a crowd

their ill for healing, or to experience healing themselves. In a few instances, the crowd's reason for being with Jesus is not explicitly stated, as in the two feeding episodes, although in such cases some or all who are there receive instruction, healing, or food from Jesus.

The crowds' relationship with Jesus—their reasons for coming to Jesus, the benefits they receive from him, and their intense desire for him—suggests that Jesus is not just publicly known and acclaimed but is also in their estimation a public benefactor, one who provides for the wellbeing of a people, city, or group through some sort of service, material or philosophical.⁴³ In the Greco-Roman world, this could include funding public buildings, festivals and games, educational initiatives, or resource distribution (oil, wine, grain). It could also be related to virtuous acts, such as the work of the physician or the counsel of the philosopher.⁴⁴ Emperors were among the most famous benefactors, offering provisions such as tax relief, money, buildings, games, shows, festivals, and grain to cities.⁴⁵ In return for their acts of beneficence, benefactors received honors from the populace, whether formally as statues and inscriptions or informally as public cheers.⁴⁶ Jesus does

in Mark 5. Overall, the important takeaway is probably that the crowds become a loose association of people who are characterized by fascination with and need of Jesus and who are generally distinguished from the politically and religiously prominent.

⁴³ Danker, *Benefactor*, 26–27. Cf. Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence*, esp. 6, 32–33. Zuiderhoek defines euergetism (benefaction) as “a form of gift-exchange between a rich citizen and his (occasionally her) city/community of fellow citizens, or groups within the citizenry.” This definition is less focused on deeds that fundamentally help the populace, though such deeds were sometimes entailed in benefaction (though, as Zuiderhoek emphasizes, such deeds did not usually help the poor).

While Jesus was not rich or elite in the typical sense, he clearly has access to resources from the divine, which he bestows upon people.

⁴⁴ Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence*, 32–33; Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 42–43.

⁴⁵ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 151; Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, trans. Brian Pearce, abridged (London: Penguin, 1990), 347–77, 385–90. For example, Augustus sponsored numerous public buildings in Rome and elsewhere across the empire. So consult John Nicols, *Civic Patronage in the Roman Empire*, Mnemone Sup HACA 365 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 105–6. In his *Res gestae divi Aug.*, Augustus mentions his provisions of grain (5, 15, 18), the land or money he gave in return for military service (3), and other monetary gifts (16, 17, 18).

⁴⁶ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 86–87. Cf. Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 43; Danker, *Benefactor*, 30; Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence*, 10–11. According to Zuiderhoek, while non-elite members of the city could grant the benefactor honor for such deeds, benefactors only gained their full degree of honor for their benefactions when the deed was considered a public gift.

not provide financial gifts or edifices for the towns he visits, but he does offer wisdom (like the gift of the philosopher), healing and exorcism (like the gift of the doctor), and sometimes even food (like the occasional gift of the elite and the emperor).⁴⁷

The crowds understand this, receive Jesus's beneficence, and react to it in gratitude by granting him public esteem.⁴⁸ Not only do they spread word about what he has done, they reinforce his esteem by coming to him and sometimes even begging for his good deeds. For instance, the implication of 1:45 is that, in response to the report of the man healed of leprosy, crowds flock to Jesus, likely either for healing or to witness his deeds. In 3:9–10, learning of Jesus's many healings, the masses develop increased fervor for more healings, to the point that they almost crush Jesus. For those who witness them (as well as for the narrative audience), Jesus's healings might call to mind the healing acts of the deities Hercules, Isis, and Asclepius, or they might invite association with noted heroes—such as Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, or Asclepiades the physician of Augustus—who were reputed for their healing abilities. They might even create associations with the healing powers attributed to Augustus (Philo, *Embassy* 144–45) and Vespasian (Tacitus *Ann.* 4.81–82; Suetonius *Vesp.* 7.2; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 65.8).⁴⁹

Crowds also grant Jesus public esteem by marveling at his deeds, and thus demonstrating their approval of him. As previously discussed, the crowd of 1:21–28 responds with astonishment, affirmation of Jesus's authority, and praise of God. Then, in Mark 2–8, crowds are once again astonished by Jesus's actions three additional times: 2:1–12, 5:1–20, and 7:31–37.

⁴⁷ Watson suggests that Jesus, rather than serving as a direct benefactor, or patron, is a broker for the patron God (*Honor among Christians*, 47–48).

⁴⁸ In contrast to typical Greco-Roman benefactions, however, Jesus's benefactions do not seem to be motivated by the opportunity to gain esteem. On the political and manipulative side of benefaction, consult Nicols, *Civic Patronage*, 86–87.

⁴⁹ Wendy Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook for the Study of New Testament Miracle Stories* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 11–53.

In 2:1–12, when Jesus announces that the paralyzed man’s sins are forgiven and subsequently cures the man’s paralysis in defense of his own authority (and ability) to forgive sins as “the Son of Humanity,” the crowd is “amazed [ἐξίστασθαι].” The Greek term ἐξίστημι, can mean to “lose one’s wits” or “be distraught” but can also refer to positive astonishment.⁵⁰ The latter connotation fits with the crowd’s next action: glorifying God and exclaiming, “We have never seen such a thing!” (2:12). Actually, this entire scene underscores Jesus’s honor in several ways. First, it shows him to be a capable healer, the impressiveness of which is emphasized by Jesus’s rhetorical question in 2:9. Second, it features Jesus having the ability to perceive others’ thoughts. Third, although Jesus does not clarify the exact meaning of the term “Son of Humanity” in this passage (for the characters *or* the narrative audience), by referring to himself as such in relation to a claim to authority, he seems to indicate that he is an agent of God, perhaps the figure from Dan 7.⁵¹ Fourth, as Benjamin Pascut argues, this scene emphasizes that Jesus has divinely given authority to forgive sins, since forgiveness for sins, which are against God, is a divine prerogative. Fifth, as Pascut also argues, in featuring Jesus’s authority to forgive sins and his act of so doing, the scene suggests that in some way Jesus is divine.⁵² Exactly how much of all this the crowd catches is unclear, although they must understand Jesus to be an impressive, divinely sanctioned agent of great deeds since their response is to glorify God for what they have witnessed.⁵³

⁵⁰ “ἐξίστημι,” *LJ*, 595.

⁵¹ I adopt the common view that Jesus’s use of “Son of Humanity” is a self-reference throughout Mark. So consult Benjamin Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity Through a Social Science Theory: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Forgiveness and Divine Identity in Ancient Judaism and Mark 2:1–12*, WUNT 2/438 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 188–90; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 212–13; Collins, *Mark*, 187–89. Collins and Moloney discuss this issue vis-à-vis the historical Jesus as well. Collins also suggests that “Son of Humanity” here is a reference to the figure in Dan 7: “Although in the narrative context of the Gospel of Mark as a whole, the epithet ‘Son of Man’ in 2:10 is ambiguous, especially for uninformed members of the audience, it acclaims Jesus as the figure of Daniel 7, as interpreted by the followers of Jesus, for informed members of the audience.”

⁵² Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity*, esp. parts 2 and 3.

⁵³ Pascut argues that the crowd’s reaction, while positive, reveals their understanding of Jesus’s identity to be insufficient. This results in situational irony for the narrative audience, who should discern that Jesus shares in God’s

In 5:1–20 after Jesus exorcizes the legion of demons and the healed man proclaims the exorcism in the Decapolis, “all were marveling” (πάντες ἐθαύμαζον) at the news. In this case, the verb θαυμάζω is used in the sense of “honor, admire, worship.”⁵⁴ In 7:31–37, after Jesus restores a man’s hearing and speech, those present respond with complete astonishment (ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο). Here, not only is it insufficient to report simply that the crowd is astonished, but it is also insufficient to report that the crowd is *extraordinarily* astonished, using περισσῶς. Instead, the crowd is said to be “beyond extraordinarily” (ὑπερπερισσῶς) astonished.⁵⁵ In addition, the crowd assesses that Jesus “has done everything well” (7:37). Interestingly, in this scene Jesus takes the man aside to heal him privately, but somehow the group learns of his deed, perhaps by encountering the healed man.

In several other passages in Mark 2–8, crowds’ responses to Jesus’s teaching, healing, exorcizing, or feeding are not narrated; however, the larger narrative flow suggests that in such scenes Jesus leaves a positive impression on these crowds. This inference is supported by three particular aspects of the narrative: (1) the reasons (to be taught, to receive healing, to request healing for someone else) for which the crowds continue to come to Jesus, (2) the generally positive responses recorded in early scenes (chs. 1–2) and reaffirmed occasionally in later scenes (chs. 3, 5, and 7), and (3) the specific circumstances surrounding the negative reactions of onlookers in two remaining scenes.

divinity and may even find it appropriate that the crowd praises God for Jesus’s actions (*Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity*, 193–99). One wonders, though, why the crowd would be incapable of discerning the divine aspect of Jesus’s identity if the scribes, who believe Jesus to be blasphemous, are capable of doing so (though reject the notion). Perhaps the praise given to God is not an indication of the crowd failing to understand Jesus’s identity but a natural response to the mighty deeds of an agent of God in their midst.

⁵⁴ “θαυμάζω,” *LSJ*, 785.

⁵⁵ Cf. Decker, *Mark 1–8*, 203; ὑπερπερισσῶς “emphasizes ‘the excessive degree’...of the verb it modifies (ἐξεπλήσσοντο).”

Those passages in which crowds respond negatively to Jesus are telling exceptions to the overall positive trajectory of Mark 1–8 in which Jesus’s public honor builds.⁵⁶ Although the exorcism of the legion of demons in 5:1–20 culminates with the amazement of those in the Decapolis, those in the land of the Gerasenes who learn of the exorcism and the death of the two thousand pigs respond in fear, begging Jesus to leave their town (5:15–17). It seems that Jesus’s actions, while liberating to the individual man, threaten the community’s livelihood.⁵⁷ If we are to read the events in this story on a literal level only, the loss of thousands of pigs is undoubtedly an economic hit to the Gerasenes. In no other scene is Jesus’s miracle working so costly to a person or group.⁵⁸ We can also read the passage in light of its imperial undertones: “Legion” is the Latin word for army (*legio*), the term used for the pigs can also refer to military recruits, Jesus’s dismissal of the pigs echoes a military command, and the rushing off the cliff echoes a battle charge.⁵⁹ An empire-critical reading has Jesus expelling a Roman army from the land of the Gerasenes. As Seong Hee Kim argues, the Gerasenes are suffering under Roman colonization, but “they choose to stay within the worldly empire, not wanting any change or risk. Indeed, they see that Jesus is a threat to the imperial order

⁵⁶ Although no response from the crowd is recorded, 2:18–22 could be read as a negative interaction between Jesus and a crowd. While the questioners do compare Jesus’s disciples to the Pharisees’ disciples and John’s disciples, the question itself is not inherently antagonistic. Verse 18 specifies that only *some* Jews are fasting, so there is no demand on Jesus’s disciples to do so. Nevertheless, Jesus rises to any challenge implied in the question by offering an analogy in which he is the person of honor, the bridegroom, whose presence demands merriment and whose absence will one day be cause for fasting. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 197. Collins describes the question and response in 2:18a–19a as “a classic controversy-dialogue or pronouncement story in which the main character is challenged and responds with a striking saying.” This question and response are followed by elaboration in 2:19b–22.

⁵⁷ And, while the demon-possessed man could have been a threat to the larger community in his demon possession, it seems that in practice he was a threat only to himself. Even though no one was able to restrain him successfully any longer, he merely stayed among the tombs and the mountains, “lacerating himself with stones” (5:4–5).

⁵⁸ Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 271–73. The Gerasenes’ fear may very well be in part a response to a recognition of divine power, as Collins suggests. What’s significant about this story is that such divine power *threatens* the Gerasenes in an unusual way for Mark’s narrative. While others respond in fear due to failing to recognize Jesus (6:49–50) or coming to terms with Jesus’s resurrection and absence (16:8), these people are fearful because of Jesus’s presence and deeds.

⁵⁹ Seong Hee Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire: A Korean Postcolonial Perspective*, BMW 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 64. Cf. J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac,” *JSNT* 3 (1979): 2–17, esp. 5; Richard Dormandy, “The Expulsion of Legion: A Political Reading of Mark 5:1–20,” *ExpTim* 111 (2000): 335–47, esp. 335.

and society.”⁶⁰ They surely fear that there will be repercussions for Jesus’s actions. Perhaps the destruction of the pigs *is* the repercussion from the Roman army. The Gerasenes beg Jesus to leave because his powerful deeds put them in a precarious situation.

A different dynamic occurs in 6:1–6. Jesus is teaching in a synagogue in his hometown, and the “many” who hear him are astounded (ἐξεπλήσσαντο), as in 1:22 and 7:31–37, but here the use of ἐκπλήσσω is negative. Those who hear are offended (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο) that Jesus—the local carpenter of unspectacular family origin—is carrying out “such acts of power” (αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται), which are otherwise not narrated in the scene, and has been given such wisdom.⁶¹ Their incredulity that *this man* (who, in their perspective has no claim to high status) could be endowed to do such impressive things causes Jesus’s miraculous abilities to be uncharacteristically hindered, although not completely inhibited: he is still able to heal a few sick people (6:5). In 6:4 Jesus himself explains the atypical treatment he receives, saying, “A prophet is not dishonored (ἄτιμος) except in his hometown, and among his family, and in his own house.”⁶² Indeed, among the general public, Jesus is otherwise frequently honored in Mark 1–8.

In Private Interactions

Since honor was in many ways decidedly public in Mark’s first-century CE context, the crowds play an important role in building Jesus’s honor in the first half of the Gospel. There are three other categories of characters who also interact positively with Jesus in these chapters with the

⁶⁰ Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire*, 64–65.

⁶¹ Jesus’s humble origins are particularly interesting in light of the Gospel’s allusions to the imperial cult. According to Lendon, when an emperor could not boast a strong pedigree, it became necessary for those praising him to “hide the disgrace with some ruse” by asserting that he was begotten in heaven.” Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 109–111, esp. 110. Lendon is quoting Menander Rhetor 370.12.

⁶² In a sort of reversal of roles, now Jesus is the one who experiences wonder: “and he was astonished (ἐθαύμαζεν) by their unbelief” (6:6a). The connotation is, of course, negative. Jesus does not let the situation hinder his overall ministry, however: “And he went around the villages teaching” (6:6b).

result of building Jesus's honor, especially on Mark's discourse level: (1) those for whom Jesus performs mighty deeds in smaller settings, (2) the unclean spirits, and (3) Jesus's disciples. In each circumstance, the interactions are not public, so the characters who interact with Jesus do not necessarily contribute to Jesus's public persona of honor.⁶³ Instead, such interactions work together to build Jesus's honor for the narrative audience, who understands Jesus in light of not only the crowd's perception of Jesus but also the incipit and the baptismal scene in Mark 1.

Jesus Performs Great Deeds in Small Settings

The first category is composed of the various characters who witness Jesus's miraculous deeds in private settings: namely Simon's mother-in-law, Jairus's family, and the Syrophenician woman and her daughter. There are two other scenes (7:31–37; 8:22–26) that feature private healings but that are included in the previous section because of the predominance of the crowd either in the initial request for healing (8:22–26) or in both the initial request and the response to the healing (7:31–37). Both the scene in which Jesus raises Jairus's daughter and the scene in which he heals the Syrophenician woman's daughter begin in public settings but quickly move into individual homes (in each case the events preceding the healing are included in Table 1, but not the actual healing).

The curing of Simon's mother-in-law in 1:29–31 is the first healing in the Gospel (and Jesus's second mighty deed, following the exorcism in 1:22–28). It takes place in her home; the woman, Jesus, and Jesus's disciples are the only people said to be present. Jesus heals the woman by raising her up and “taking hold of [her] hand” (1:31). This scene occurs in the midst of several

⁶³ Jesus's interactions with these groups differ from his encounters with local religious leaders, who oppose Jesus throughout the narrative, because (1) those interactions are often in public settings and (2) while Jesus's honor is ultimately built in those scenes, such occurs despite the religious leaders' efforts to the contrary. I discuss Jesus's interactions with the religious leaders in the section “Gaining Opposition.”

public-miracle scenes and features Jesus's power over illness, along with the woman's implicit gratitude, since she begins to serve (διηκόνει) Jesus and the disciples.⁶⁴

In 5:21–24, 35–43 Jairus, a synagogue leader, approaches Jesus while he is surrounded by a crowd, falls at his feet (πίπτει πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ), and begs Jesus to save his daughter from death by laying his hands upon her to heal her.⁶⁵ Although Jesus heals the woman with the hemorrhage first, he eventually goes with Jairus, Peter, James, and John to Jairus's house. The girl is now dead, but in 5:39 Jesus refers to her as simply sleeping (καθεύδει).⁶⁶ Those who are mourning in the house laugh at Jesus, after (and perhaps because of) which Jesus sends them outside. He then raises the girl from the dead in the presence of only the girl's mother and father (Jairus) and "those with him," Peter, James, and John (5:40). According to 5:42, the response of these few onlookers is to be "astonished with great shock" (ἐξέστησαν ἐκστάσει μεγάλη). Jesus impresses once again, doing the seemingly impossible. The mourners may laugh at Jesus when he says the girl is not dead, but Jesus's resurrection of the girl proves him effectually right to those who witness the event. Although the characters may not make this connection, the narrative audience might compare Jesus's actions to the idea that emperors had power to grant life. For instance, "The Augustan rhetoric which proclaimed the Caesars to be the source of life for all would issue in Seneca's suggested soliloquy for Nero, that his role was 'to give safety to many and to recall them to life from the very brink of death' (*De clementia* 1.26.5)."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Although the connection is not explicitly clear at this stage of the narrative, service is a key principle for followers of Jesus. This passage may suggest that the woman is a disciple of Jesus, however, since Jesus's healing actions (ἡγείρεν, κρατήσας) are in the aorist, suggesting one-time deeds, whereas the woman's service is in the imperfect (διηκόνει), suggesting an ongoing action. For this argument, consult Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark*, 102–5.

⁶⁵ Jairus stays with Jesus until after Jesus heals the woman with the hemorrhage. It is possible that the crowd surrounding Jesus in 5:21, when Jairus approaches Jesus, is different from the crowd in 5:24.

⁶⁶ Cf. Apuleius, *Flor.* 19. Apuleius writes of Asclepiades saving a man from a funeral pyre. The man was thought dead, but Asclepiades recognizes that he is actually alive.

⁶⁷ Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 167.

Jesus's encounter with the Syrophenician woman in 7:25–30 is one of the more curious episodes in the Gospel. The scene is set in the region of Tyre, with Jesus attempting to stay hidden in someone's home. His reason for being there and his reason for wanting to “escape notice” (λαθεῖν) are not explained, although the intense behavior of crowds throughout the Gospel's early chapters suggests he may desire a reprieve. Nevertheless, the Syrophenician woman comes to him, prostrates herself at his feet (προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ; 7:26), and asks him to exorcize a demon from her daughter. Jesus's response to the woman is singular in the Gospel; this is the only time he responds to a suppliant with a dishonoring insult. It is not yet time for such a miracle, he states, since “the children” (people of Israel) are to be “satisfied first,” before bread is thrown to the “dogs” (κυνάρῳ; 7:27), or non-Jews.⁶⁸ Why Jesus feels this way is unclear when one considers that he has already healed the Gerasene man in 5:1–20. Despite Jesus's attitude and insult, however, the woman maintains her deferential, if assertive, approach. Calling Jesus Κύριε—a term of respect, whether it simply means “sir” or has theological implications here—she accepts the terms of Jesus's insult but gently challenges him: “Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs” (7:28). In reply, Jesus rewards the woman's logic and persistence, telling her that the demon has left her daughter “on account of this reasoning” (λόγον; 7:29).

This scene demonstrates that Jesus is powerful and authoritative: he can perform an exorcism even at a distance.⁶⁹ It is also one of the few instances in the Gospel when a character engages Jesus in a verbal sparring and is commended for her reasoning (cf. 12:28–34). Most often,

⁶⁸ Consult Collins, *Mark*, 366–67: “To compare someone else with a dog was insulting and dishonoring.” Several examples in the HB, Qumran texts, and rabbinic texts demonstrate this to be true in Jewish contexts. Collins notes that at times rabbinic literature also uses the term “dog” to refer to Gentiles. For similarly negative attitudes, as well as some positive attitudes, toward dogs in the classical world and the Ancient Near East, consult Douglas Brewer, Terence Clark, and Adrian Phillips, eds., *Dogs in Antiquity, Anubis to Cerberus: The Origins of the Domestic Dog* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2001).

⁶⁹ The text does not explicitly state that Jesus exorcizes the demon. Rather, Jesus tells the woman that “the demon has left your daughter”; however, the implication is clear. Cf. 3:5, 5:27–30, 7:32–35, in which the passive voice is used in Jesus's healings. For a relevant treatment of these passages, consult Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus' Divinity*, 160–63.

when Jesus is challenged, the challenge is antagonistic, and Jesus bests the challengers. Here, the woman outwits Jesus and changes his mind, catalyzing him to carry out two miraculous deeds: a remote exorcism (7:29–30) and the feeding of a Gentile multitude (8:1–9).⁷⁰ Interestingly, the woman accomplishes all this by adopting shame before Jesus and honoring him. In Roman honor, such behavior was common “before someone...to whom one wished to be bound, with whom one wished to be associated or identified.”⁷¹ By humbly honoring Jesus, yet also challenging him, she receives honor and benefaction from him.⁷²

The healing of Simon’s mother-in-law helps establish Jesus’s powerful abilities near the start of his public ministry. The raising of Jairus’s daughter emphasizes that Jesus’s power extends over death, while the exorcism of the demon from the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter emphasizes Jesus’s power over demons even from afar. The requests of Jairus and the Syrophoenician women emphasize yet again that Jesus’s reputation precedes him wherever he goes and that those among the elite as well as outsiders recognize Jesus’s great abilities. Both characters show Jesus respect by prostrating themselves before him.⁷³ The Syrophoenician woman, though she challenges Jesus,

⁷⁰ For this line of interpretation regarding Jesus’s attitude and the woman’s impactful role in changing Jesus’s mind, consult Pablo Alonso, *The Woman Who Changed Jesus: Crossing Boundaries in Mark 7:24–30*, BTS 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), esp. 287–338.

On the question of Jesus feeding Gentiles in 8:1–9, in the two preceding episodes, Jesus had been in Gentile regions of Tyre and the Decapolis, and no marker of movement between regions occurs between 7:31 and 8:1. As Kelly R. Iverson has pointed out, Mark is consistently clear about whether Jesus is in Jewish or Gentile regions and often uses the sea to indicate those changes. After 8:1–9, Jesus is said to go to across the sea to Dalmanutha, which the Gospel seems to portray as a Jewish region. The implied audience does not have a reason to think Jesus has left a Gentile region in 8:1–9 (*Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: ‘Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children’s Crumbs,’* [London: T&T Clark International, 2007], 67–69). Iverson notes that all the textual variants of 8:10, which provide alternative locations to Dalmanutha, offer western and thus Jewish options. For another treatment of Jesus’s sea crossings as related to Jewish and Gentile space, consult Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 363–77, esp. 367–73.

⁷¹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 208.

⁷² The interaction in this scene and, in fact, his interactions with women throughout the Gospel stand in stark contrast to Jesus’s interactions with the religious leaders. Jesus’s interactions with women are status-building for both parties, while the interactions with the local leaders are antagonistic and zero-sum.

⁷³ Mark invites further comparison of Jairus and the Syrophoenician woman. Consult Iverson, *Gentiles*, 47–48.

further honors him by calling him “Lord.”⁷⁴ In all three scenes, Jesus performs mighty deeds in private settings amidst small audiences. No indication is given that the characters spread word of Jesus’s activities, but the interactions are testimonies to Jesus’s reputation and further underscore it for the narrative audience.

Unclean Spirits Announce Jesus’s Identity

The second category of characters who build Jesus’s honor in non-public ways is the unclean spirits Jesus encounters and exorcises five times in this section of the Gospel (1:23–26, 1:39, 3:11, 5:8–13, and 7:29–30). Although the spirits may not be supportive of Jesus or his mission, Jesus nevertheless has some control over them, and they attest to his high status. During three of the five exorcism scenes, the demons acknowledge Jesus’s special status vis-à-vis God. They call him “holy one of God” (1:24), “son of God” (3:11), and “son of the Most High God” (5:7). The unclean spirits of 3:11 also prostrate themselves before Jesus. Those of 1:23–26 acknowledge Jesus’s power over them by asking “Have you come to destroy us?” (1:24). Those of 5:7–13 beg Jesus not to torture them and ask for permission to enter the pigs rather than be sent out of the country of the Gerasenes. In each case, it is clear that Jesus has authority that exceeds the power of the demons, and the demons are well aware of the power and status differential.

Despite the demons’ proclamations and actions that show deference to Jesus, it seems that the people present are not aware of anything beyond Jesus’s authority to cast out demons. For reasons discussed in the section “Jesus and the ‘Secret,’” in 1:25 Jesus commands the demons to “be silent,” and in 3:12 he orders them “not to make him known.” No such command is found in 5:7–

⁷⁴ Kinukawa argues that the woman dishonors Jesus by leaving her home and approaching him in “a public setting” (*Women and Jesus*, 54–55). The setting is not public, but regardless this is an oversimplification of women’s domain and actions in the Greco-Roman world. The only dishonoring that occurs in this scene is when Jesus makes reference to “dogs,” and by the end of the scene, both Jesus and the woman are portrayed honorably, though in different ways.

13, but Jesus and the man with Legion seem not to be within earshot of anyone else. At any rate, Jesus's commands in 1:25 and 3:12 would be useless if the crowds were already privy to the demonic declarations, but such seems not to be the case. Thus, demonic actions do not build Jesus's public honor in Mark's narrative, but they reaffirm for the narrative audience Jesus's special status with God and his imperial associations.

Jesus's Followers Reinforce His Honor

The third group of characters whose interactions with Jesus feature his honor, though not always publicly, is Jesus's followers. From very early on in the Gospel, Jesus gains a following. He calls his first disciples—Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John—in 1:16–20. In 2:14 he calls Levi the tax collector, and during the subsequent dinner at Levi's house in 2:15–17, Jesus is surrounded by many tax collectors and sinners who also follow him. Out of them all, only twelve of Jesus's disciples, identified in 3:13–19, are especially prominent throughout the Gospel, with Peter, James, and John as the most prominent subgroup of the twelve.

In 3:13–19, when Jesus appoints the twelve disciples to have insider access to him, he also grants them authority to exorcise demons. In 4:10–20, 34 Jesus exclusively explains the meaning of parables to the twelve, saying, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God." Then, in 6:7–13, Jesus sends out the twelve and instructs them preach the message of repentance (6:11–12, 30) and grants them "authority over unclean spirits" (6:7, 13) and the ability to cure the sick (6:13). Jesus's special relationship with the twelve is, in part, one of empowerment with regard to healing teaching, and knowledge, and it features his own authority and power. Not only can he command demons, he can delegate power to his followers to do the same. While Jesus's followers are, on the whole, not portrayed as people of high status (fishermen 1:16, 18; tax collectors 2:15) or those who

are particularly righteous (2:15–17), Jesus’s own role as a group leader and his authority to empower a subset of his followers contribute to his honor.

Jesus’s disciples witness some of his powerful, but not public, deeds. He calms a raging sea and thus saves his disciples and himself from the possibility of drowning (4:35–41), he raises a dead girl back to life in front of Peter, James, and John (5:35–43; discussed above), and he walks on water to meet the disciples in a boat and ends a violent windstorm (6:45–52). By featuring Jesus’s power over death and nature, these scenes portray him performing deeds reminiscent of rulers and the divine.

Power over the sea was often associated with mythological figures or rulers in Greco-Roman culture. For example, the notion that Augustus was master of both land and sea became an established part of imperial propaganda. In his own *Res gestae*, Augustus makes reference to the closing of the gates of the temple of Janus “which our ancestors ordered to be closed whenever there was peace, secured by victory, throughout the whole domain of the Roman people on land and sea” (13 [Shipley, LCL]). Virgil suggests that the deified Augustus will “come as god of the boundless sea” (*Georg.* 1.29 [Fairclough, LCL]). In the 40s CE, Philo refers to Augustus as “the Caesar who calmed the torrential storms on every side,” bringing peace to both land and sea (*Embassy*, 144–45 [Colson, LCL]). Inscriptions and artwork also featured this motif.⁷⁵ The ability to control storms on sea or land was ascribed to other rulers as well. In Calpurnius Siculus’s honorific poem to Nero ca. 50–60 CE, a shepherd celebrates how “the sound of Caesar’s name” calms a storm: “despite the swoop of a storm, the grove, even as now, sank sudden into peace with boughs at rest. And I said, ‘A god, surely a god, has driven the east winds hence’” (*Eclogue* 4.97–100 [Duff and Duff]). Xerxes, Alexander the Great, and Caligula were also said to control the sea in some

⁷⁵ “Inscriptions praised Augustus as ‘overseer of every land and sea’ (...Pergamum No. 381)” (Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 133). Cf. 140: “A gem carved in 31 BC to celebrate his triumph at Actium pictures Octavian as Poseidon pulled by four horses across the waves.”

sense. Bolt surmises that Mark, in granting Jesus the abilities attributed metaphorically to rulers such as Augustus (which in the biblical tradition were otherwise attributed to God), “signal[s] his [Jesus’s] “divine authorisation, and perhaps even his own divine rule, on a par with Alexander, and the great Augustus.”⁷⁶

The full implication of Jesus’s greatness is lost on the disciples. In 4:41, they respond in fear (literally “they feared a great fear”) and ask, “Who, then, is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”⁷⁷ In 6:51, after Jesus walks on water the disciples are “very, exceedingly astonished (ἐξίσταντο) in themselves.”⁷⁸ Here, the disciples’ astonishment is a consequence of their lack of understanding. Not only have they previously witnessed Jesus calming a storm, they also have more recently been with Jesus as he miraculously fed a great multitude. Mark attributes their astonishment to their failure to “understand concerning the bread loaves, but their heart was hardened” (6:52).

This failure to understand is part of a larger trajectory throughout Mark in which the disciples do not fully grasp Jesus’s identity or mission.⁷⁹ It begins as early as Mark 4, when the disciples struggle to understand Jesus’s parables, despite Jesus’s indication that they have been given insider insight about the kingdom (cf. 4:10–13).⁸⁰ Such lack of understanding is further emphasized

⁷⁶ Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 141. Bolt discusses the above examples in his monograph. Cf. Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity*, 57, 67–72. Pascut holds that, in these sea scenes, Mark portrays Jesus as sharing in God’s divine identity. Cf. Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 85. Winn also draws upon Bolt and argues that Jesus is portrayed as greater than these rulers in response to Flavian propaganda.

⁷⁷ Decker reads this fear as reverential awe to be contrasted with their fear (δαιμό) of the storm. Decker, *Mark 1–8*, 115.

⁷⁸ The Greek is very emphatic: λίαν [ἐκ περισσοῦ] ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐξίσταντο. On the translation itself and the inclusion of ἐκ περισσοῦ in the translation, consult Collins, *Mark*, 316–17. Cf. Decker, *Mark 1–8*, 176.

⁷⁹ Theodore J. Weeden refers to this early trajectory as the disciples’ imperceptivity. He understands the Gospel’s portrayal of the disciples to be part of a polemical trajectory that rejects them and the group they represent in the early church (“The Heresy that Necessitated Mark’s Gospel,” *ZNW* 59 [1968]: 145–158). The disciples are far from ideal characters, but Weeden’s stance is too extreme, not taking into account the reinstatement of the disciples that occurs after Jesus’s resurrection.

⁸⁰ They also fail to understand Jesus’s teaching on defilement in ch. 7. So consult 7:17–23.

in 8:1–10 when Jesus performs his *second* miraculous feeding but not before his disciples ask, “From what source will anyone be able to satisfy these people with loaves of bread here, in the desert?” (8:4). Then, when Jesus warns them against the “yeast of the Pharisees” in 8:15, the disciples think he is upset at them for forgetting to bring bread on the boat.

Bolt suggests that the disciples do not understand that Jesus is a capable leader and ruler who is also the great “I AM.” As insiders to Jesus who experience his theophanic actions, their responses to Jesus are positive, yet they are muddled by confusion and surprise.⁸¹ By admiring but failing to truly appreciate the significance of Jesus’s abilities, the disciples do not fully honor Jesus as do characters who understand Jesus even without experiencing such powerful events.⁸² Nonetheless, the disciples *do* recognize Jesus’s special status enough to consider him the Messiah, which I discuss in the following chapter. Further, the motif of the disciples’ lack of understanding reiterates to the narrative audience Jesus’s portrayal and abilities as a divinely ordained leader and ruler. Thus, despite the disciples’ shortcomings, Jesus’s honor continues to be built among his disciples and even more emphatically for the narrative audience.

Gaining Opposition

Beginning in Mark 2, certain groups of local leaders covertly and overtly challenge Jesus’s teaching and actions. These interactions are markedly different from almost all other interactions Jesus has in Mark 1–8. Whereas crowds and individual suppliants are overwhelmingly receptive of Jesus; unclean spirits are compelled to acknowledge Jesus’s authority and status; and the disciples, while imperceptive, faithfully follow him and embrace his mighty deeds, the groups of local leaders

⁸¹ Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 195, 209.

⁸² As Joel F. Williams argues, In Mark 4–8, “Minor characters stand in contrast to the disciples, because they express faith in Jesus and because they exemplify or symbolize a true understanding of Jesus’s ministry and teaching” (“Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark’s Gospel,” *BSac* 153 [1996]: 332–43, esp. 338).

who challenge Jesus are antagonistic toward him, attempting to undermine and discredit him.⁸³ The destructive motivation of these groups is not initially obvious, although by 3:1–6 the narrative audience learns that some are secretly plotting to destroy Jesus. The antagonistic and oppositional nature of the various groups becomes increasingly obvious throughout Mark 1–8, which sets the stage for open hostility and repeated attempts at public humiliation in the latter half of the Gospel.⁸⁴

The groups who challenge and oppose Jesus in Mark 1–8 are identified as Pharisees and scribes, with a single reference to the Herodians, who do not seem to come into direct contact with Jesus in the narrative but conspire with the Pharisees in 3:6 to destroy him nonetheless.⁸⁵ Sometimes, the scribes Jesus encounters are referred to nonspecifically as scribes. Other passages mention specific groups of scribes: scribes of the Pharisees (2:15–17) and scribes from Jerusalem (3:22–30; 7:1–13). The ambiguity and variety make sense, as scribes were not a single, homogenous group. Mark portrays the scribes and Pharisees (and other groups that will come into play in the second half of the Gospel) as local religious groups of some importance, since they feel free to question Jesus openly concerning religious matters such as Jewish law and tradition. In the first century, neither the Pharisees nor most scribes would have been among the aristocracy proper, although many scribes were likely also priests or Levites and thus were connected to the temple. As educated, literate men

⁸³ Cf. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 259–81, esp. 270–72.

⁸⁴ It should be noted that Mark adopts a polemical stance toward the Pharisees, Sadducees, and other influential Jewish groups such as the high priest/chief priests and the scribes. The priests and Sadducees enter the story when Jesus goes to Jerusalem. While this polemical nature of Mark is problematic, it should not be oversimplified. As Malbon argues, “Although members of the Jewish religious establishment are generally characterized as foes of the Marcan Jesus, they may not be automatically so categorized. The Marcan Gospel does indeed schematize the Jewish religious leaders as foes of Jesus, but it refuses to absolutize that schema. Being a foe of the Marcan Jesus is a matter of how one chooses to relate to him, not a matter of one’s social or religious status and role. And the same is true of being a friend of Jesus” (“Jewish Leaders,” 276). Jairus is one such exception to Mark’s schema.

⁸⁵ The “they” in Mark 3:1–6 is ambiguous, but it seems to refer at least to the Pharisees based on the culmination of the scene (v. 6) and perhaps the preceding scene (2:23–28). Cf. Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 70.

The Herodians do appear once more in the second half of the Gospel (12:13), again collaborating with the Pharisees against Jesus.

with legal expertise, roles as local magistrates, and ties to the temple, scribes would have held a certain amount of public esteem.⁸⁶ Similarly, the Pharisees were generally “admired and respected,” holding a considerable amount of popularity among the people.⁸⁷

As people of some prestige and popular esteem, for the scribes and Pharisees to oppose Jesus threatens to undermine his honor. Indeed, their oppositional encounters with Jesus can be understood as honor challenges, since it becomes increasingly clear that the confrontations are designed to test Jesus, show him (or his disciples) to be in some way inadequate, and thus defame him. While it is not always clear whether such interactions have an audience among the narrative characters, most often the exchanges take place among a large group (2:1–12; 2:15–17; 3:22–30) or in a public setting (3:1–6).⁸⁸ Once, in 7:1–13, there is at least a crowd nearby, since Jesus calls them “to himself again” in 7:14. Two other times (2:23–28, 8:11–13) there is no audience said to be present except Jesus’s disciples. Inasmuch as the interactions have a larger audience, they specifically threaten to discredit Jesus publicly and immediately. Those interactions that take place in private contribute to the growing hostility between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees, and they build momentum toward conflicts in the second half of the Gospel.

In Mark 2–8 the scribes and Pharisees always come to Jesus, rather than the reverse, and in all but two cases they initiate the conversation with Jesus (2:1–12; 3:1–6). In the two cases in which Jesus initiates conversation, the narrative audience is informed of the antagonistic attitudes of the local leaders, which Jesus himself perceives. As is represented in Table 2, in every interaction Jesus responds to the spoken or unspoken critique with rhetorical questions, quips, and/or scathing

⁸⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE*, new ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 294–98. Sanders discusses scribes but not their public esteem in particular.

⁸⁷ Sanders, 633–40. As Sanders explains, the Pharisees were a relatively popular group, but they were not *populists*, and neither did they hold special sway over the masses. They simply were well liked and appreciated.

⁸⁸ It is partially because the crowd plays such a small role in these scenes, present or not, that I have excluded them from the section “With the Public,” 2:1–12 being the exception.

critiques. In each situation, Jesus's has the last word, and he is thus portrayed as putting his opponents in their place. In so doing, Jesus foils all attempts to discredit him and defends his honor as an authorized agent of God who interprets the scriptures and does God's work.

Table 2: Jesus and His Opponents in Mark 2:1–8:13

Passage	Group	Accusation or Challenge	Jesus's Response
2:1–12	Scribes	(It is blasphemy to claim to forgive sins)	"Why do you consider these things in your hearts? What is easier, to say to the man who is paralyzed, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and lift up your mat and walk'? But in order that you might know that the Son of Humanity has authority to forgive sins on the earth,...I say to you, rise, lift up your mat, and go to your home."
2:15–17	Scribes of the Pharisees	Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners	"Those who are strong do not have need of a physician, but the sick have [need]; I did not come to call righteous ones, but sinners."
2:23–28	Pharisees	Jesus's disciples are picking grain on the Sabbath	Appeals to David entering the house of God; "The Sabbath was made on account of humanity, and not humanity on account of the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Humanity is Lord even of the Sabbath."
3:1–6	Pharisees (likely)	(Watch to see if Jesus will heal a man's hand and thus break the Sabbath)	"Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to injure? To save a life or to kill?"
3:22–30	Scribes from Jerusalem	Jesus has Beelzebul and casts out demons thus	"How can Satan cast out Satan?" Insists that a divided kingdom "cannot stand" and that a strong man can be plundered once he is tied up; "Truly I say to you that all sins and as many blasphemies as they may blaspheme will be forgiven the children of humanity, but whoever might blaspheme against the Holy Spirit does not have forgiveness for eternity but is guilty of eternal sin."
7:1–13	Pharisees, some scribes from Jerusalem	Jesus's disciples are eating with defiled hands and do not keep the tradition of the elders	Calls them hypocrites and quotes Isaiah; "You have a fine way of setting aside the commandment of God in order that you might keep your tradition." Accuses them of failing to honor their parents in order to keep oaths.
8:11–13	Pharisees	Argue with Jesus, test him by asking for a sign	"Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."

Interestingly, the challenges to Jesus begin with one of these two instances when a group of scribes *silently* questions Jesus for proclaiming forgiveness of sins. They inwardly accuse him of blasphemy, thinking, "Why does this man speak thus? He blasphemes. Who is able to forgive sins except the one God?" (2:7). The scribes perceive Jesus as laying claim to a prerogative otherwise

reserved for the one God, whom they are sure Jesus is not.⁸⁹ Somehow knowing their thoughts, Jesus addresses their critique and performs the difficult task of healing the man who is paralyzed in order to demonstrate that, as the Son of Humanity, he also has the authority—and thus the ability—to forgive sins.⁹⁰ I previously outlined the ways in which Jesus’s actions in this passage demonstrate to the public his honor as a divine agent of healing and forgiveness. Here I wish to emphasize that Jesus, by bringing the criticism of the scribes into the open and demonstrating his divinely authorized power, anticipates and satisfactorily addresses the challenge posed. In fact, Jesus turns the situation on its head, interrogating *the scribes* for questioning in their hearts. Because Jesus is able to demonstrate his words through deeds, the failure of the scribes to answer his question reinforces his victory in the challenge and diminishes their reputation.⁹¹

The example of 2:1–12 depicts an honor challenge between Jesus and the scribes but does not communicate the offensive, and eventually aggressive, role Jesus’s opponents adopt. In the next two challenge scenes, which also occur in Mark 2, Jesus’s opponents initiate honor challenges with him. In 2:15–17, when Jesus is at a dinner with “many tax collectors and sinners,” the scribes of the Pharisees question why Jesus eats with such people. The question is not posed directly to Jesus but to his disciples; however, Jesus hears it, and in reply, he insists that he came “to call not righteous ones but sinners.” While the scribes may take issue with this behavior on purity grounds, there is likely also a critique of Jesus’s associations—that is, his willingness to associate with disreputable persons, which reflects upon Jesus’s own reputation and character for keeping such company.⁹²

⁸⁹ Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity*, 167–79.

⁹⁰ That is, the claim to forgive sins is not easily verifiable or falsifiable, while the claim to be able to heal someone is. For more on this logic, consult Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity*, 181–87.

⁹¹ Silence could also be a refusal to engage, but there is no reason to think that is what is going on here.

⁹² Collins, *Mark*, 192–95. The concern for “sinners” may be particularly Jewish, but the aversion to tax collectors was held in Greco-Roman culture as well. Dio Chrysostom refers to tax collection as a “base and unseemly”

Jesus is more interested in helping those who have need, as a physician would do (2:17), than in keeping proper company. Jesus makes an interesting move here, since his character is being challenged on account of the suspect company he keeps. He defends his character not by defending the esteem or integrity of those people with whom he associates—and therefore contesting the implicit claim—but by insisting upon his own noble cause.

Then, in 2:24, certain Pharisees question Jesus, asking why his disciples, who are plucking heads of grain as they walk through a field (2:23), do “what is not permitted on the Sabbath.” The Pharisees are probably aligning with a highly cautious interpretation of Torah commands regarding working and reaping on the Sabbath (since the commands prohibit reaping, which the disciples are not really doing), and they critique Jesus’s disciples for not upholding the same standard.⁹³ Jesus replies, first appealing to David, then alluding to the creation account of Genesis 1:1–24a, and finally citing his authority over the Sabbath as the Son of Humanity. The allusion to the creation account and the appeal to David suggest that human need is to be prioritized over Sabbath observance.⁹⁴ Jesus’s appeal to David in combination with his self-reference as “Son of Humanity” also creates an association between Jesus and David: “Just as David had authority to override conventional interpretations of the will of God because he was God’s chosen one, so also Jesus has authority [as

occupation (*Or.* 14.14 [Cohoon, LCL]). Lucian refers to those who willingly collect taxes as shameful and critiques any who are willing to dine with such people (*Pseudol.* 30–31).

⁹³ So consult Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 68; cf. Collins, *Mark*, 201–202n122–23. Among the relevant Sabbath commands are Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15. Both texts prohibit work on the Sabbath, and “according to *m. Šabb.* 7.2, reaping...is one of the thirty-nine main classes of work; Exod 34:21 implies that reaping is not permitted on the Sabbath.” But cf. Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels’ Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 155–59. Thiessen holds that the typical perspective would have considered the disciples to be breaking Sabbath.

⁹⁴ Collins, *Mark*, 203–4, explains: “If the Sabbath is meant to benefit human beings, then they are not meant to observe the Sabbath in ways that harm them. It is highly likely that most Jews at the time of Jesus and afterward would agree with that principle. In fact a similar saying occurs in rabbinic literature [*b. Yoma* 85b]. But Jesus and some of his fellow Jews may have disagreed about how to apply the principle.” Within the narrative, it is clear that Jesus’s application of this principle is quite lax, since the disciples actually seem not to have need, as they are only casually plucking grain. Jesus essentially abrogates the Torah commands, as Norman Perrin argues (“Creative Use of the Son of Man Traditions by Mark,” *USQR* 23 [1968]: 357–65).

Son of Humanity] to interpret and proclaim the will of God in the last days.”⁹⁵ In response to Jesus’s defense of his disciples and claims of authority, once again Jesus’s opponents fail to offer any sort of retort, in effect emphasizing Jesus’s dominance in the contests.

In fact, the scene in 3:1–6 is the only time in Mark 1–8 that the narrative relates Jesus’s opponents responding in any way, and here they do not even respond directly to Jesus. This time, it is clear that the opponents—likely Pharisees (3:6)—have negative intentions: they *want* to be able to make an accusation against Jesus.⁹⁶ This scene is the second occurrence of Jesus perceiving the antagonistic thoughts of his opponents. He asks them, “Is it permitted on the Sabbath to do good or to injure, to save a life or to kill?” This response alludes to a legal debate within Jewish tradition, “fit[ting] within a stream of tradition that emphasizes the preservation of life over observance of the Sabbath” and especially concerning the permissibility of self-defense and the duty to save life.⁹⁷ In ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman thinking, this man’s illness, a withered hand, associates him more closely with death than with life.⁹⁸ By comparing healing to saving a life, Jesus’s question implies that his opponents’ application of Torah is misguided. It also, being phrased as a question, asks them to account for their priorities, but they do not. Instead, Mark explicitly notes that the would-be accusers of Jesus are silent (3:4), and Jesus, “being very grieved at the hardness of their hearts,” cures the man’s hand (3:5). Whereas the opponents intend to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing, it is they who are unable to account for their behavior, while Jesus performs yet another powerful deed. Although,

⁹⁵ Collins, *Mark*, 205. Collins posits this as one of two ways of reading the Son of Humanity language in this passage, the other allowing that “son of humanity” is a general term meaning “someone.” As previously noted, I adopt the view that this is not a general reference to humanity.

⁹⁶ The situation reflects poorly on the opponents, whose desire to witness Jesus heal is *only* so they can accuse him, and not so the man can receive any liberation from his ailment.

⁹⁷ Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 165; 1 Macc 2:40–41. The same sentiment was preserved in Mishnah, *Yoma* 8.6.

⁹⁸ Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 167–68.

or maybe because, they have no public retort for Jesus, the Pharisees act in another way: they secretly plot to “destroy him” (ἀπολέσωσιν αὐτόν; 3:6).⁹⁹ This verb, ἀπόλλυμι, often is used in the active voice in the sense of “kill.”¹⁰⁰ With this action, Jesus’s opponents further demonstrate their disregard for the protection of life and even, according to some, demonstrate their disregard for keeping Sabbath itself.¹⁰¹

Beginning with 3:1–6, the interactions between Jesus and local leaders do indeed intensify, as antagonism increases on both sides. Jesus now openly critiques his opponents when confronted. For instance, in 7:1–23 when the Pharisees and some Jerusalem scribes critique Jesus’s disciples, and by extension Jesus, for failing to wash their hands before eating and therefore not following the “tradition of the elders” (7:5), Jesus aggressively upbraids the critics. Quoting Isa 29:13, he calls them hypocrites and accuses them of paying lip service to God. That is, they hold to their traditions at the expense of keeping Torah commandments. What is worse, Jesus accuses them of using God to do so. He specifically condemns their failure to support their parents financially—part of honoring father and mother—and their keeping their resources to themselves by declaring them to be “Corban,” or a votive offering to God.¹⁰² After castigating the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus summons the nearby crowd and redefines purity standards by asserting that people are only defiled by what comes out of them (7:14–15; as he explains in 21–23, such things include greed, envy, pride, etc.) rather than what goes in (unclean foods or foods eaten with defiled hands). In so doing, Jesus

⁹⁹ Just as there is a single passage in the first half of the Gospel that foreshadows Judas’s betrayal of Jesus (Mark 3:19), there is also a single passage in the first half of the Gospel that foreshadows these groups’ involvement in Jesus’s death (3:6). Once Jesus is in Jerusalem, the plotting against him is mentioned more frequently: 11:18; 12:12; 14:1–2, 10–11, 17.

¹⁰⁰ “ἀπόλλυμι,” *LSJ*, 207.

¹⁰¹ Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death*, 166. According to *Jubilees* 50:8; the Damascus Document X, 19; and the Qumran document 4Q264^a, even discussion of work is prohibited on the Sabbath.

¹⁰² For a discussion of this practice, consult R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 286–87.

once again situates himself as an authoritative interpreter of the Torah, even to the point of abrogating some dietary laws. As such, he stands apart from the Pharisees and scribes, who look to traditions to determine how Torah should be interpreted. He also neutralizes their critique of his disciples, turns it back upon his opponents, and intensifies it.

In two other passages after 3:1–6 (3:22–30 and 8:11–13), the open antagonism of Jesus’s opponents is heightened. In 3:22–30, a group of scribes who have come to Jesus’s hometown from Jerusalem launch a scathing critique, accusing him of being possessed by Beelzebul and thus casting out demons “by the ruler of the demons” (3:22; cf. 3:30).¹⁰³ Jesus responds to such defamation by undermining the scribes’ logic: Satan does not oppose himself; if he did, Satan would self-destruct. Jesus also positions himself as being stronger than the “ruler” and “strong man” Satan; he implies that, by casting out demons, he has incapacitated Satan and is attacking his now vulnerable strongholds. In a trenchant conclusion, Jesus turns the scribes’ accusation on its head: Jesus is stronger than Satan because the Spirit he has—that of God—is superior to Satan, so, by defaming Jesus, the scribes are guilty of blasphemy.

In 8:11–13, the Pharisees once again antagonize Jesus. Approaching him, they begin arguing (συζητεῖν) with him, demanding a sign in order to test him (πειράζοντες). In Mark’s narrative, the last being to test Jesus was Satan. As Collins states, “The depiction of both the Pharisees and Satan as testers of Jesus implies that both are opponents of Jesus in his role as God’s agent.”¹⁰⁴ Although there is evidently no audience to witness this interaction within the Markan story, the association of the Pharisees with Satan in this way recalls for the narrative audience Jesus’s encounter with the scribes in 3:22–30. According to Mark, if anyone is doing the work of the ruler of the demons, it is

¹⁰³ This scene is sandwiched between 3:18–20, 31–35 and almost surely is witnessed by the crowd that surrounds Jesus.

¹⁰⁴ Collins, *Mark*, 384.

Jesus's opponents.¹⁰⁵ Jesus's (non-)response to the Pharisees in 8:11–13 is a fitting one in the final controversy scene of this half of the Gospel: he refuses to give a sign and leaves. For the narrative audience, no sign is needed, since Jesus has proven his divine agency repeatedly. Here, as in 3:22–30, Jesus yet again has the last word.

Jesus and the “Secret”

Despite Jesus's rising honor throughout Mark 1–8, he frequently commands silence about his identity or deeds (1:21–28; 1:32–34; 1:40–45; 3:7–12; 5:35–43; 7:31–37; 8:22–26), seeks anonymity or privacy (1:35–39; 6:31–32; 7:24–30), or tailors his teaching to insiders (ch. 4).¹⁰⁶ Three times when Jesus commands silence—once to a human audience and twice to demons (1:21–28; 3:7–12; 5:35–43)—those addressed seem to comply. Two other times, the opposite occurs (1:40–45; 7:31–37). In 1:40–45, after Jesus heals the man with leprosy, he commands him to visit a priest to be cleansed but to tell no one else of the healing. Instead, the man begins to “proclaim it freely, and to spread the word,” with the result that Jesus cannot travel openly. Then, in 7:31–37, when Jesus cures a man's hearing loss and speech impediment, although he “ordered them [the crowd] to tell no one,” “the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.”

Jesus's behavior in these passages has puzzled interpreters at least since William Wrede labeled Jesus's concealment commands in Mark *Das Messiasgeheimnis*, often translated “the messianic secret” but also meaning “the messianic mystery.” According to Wrede, Mark inserted into his Gospel, at will, an early-Christian notion that Jesus's messiahship was a secret during Jesus's lifetime. Mark was intentional in including the motif, but his literary planning and execution were not

¹⁰⁵ Here, again, the polemical nature of Mark's text must be noted.

¹⁰⁶ In 8:22–26, Jesus does not command the man not to tell anyone, but he does tell him to go directly home instead of going even into his village.

sophisticated.¹⁰⁷ Wrede's argument still influences how Jesus's actions in Mark are understood today, although his thesis and assumptions—including his low estimation of Mark's literary aims—have not gone uncritiqued.

Debates about the concealment passages in Mark have continued since Wrede on a number of fronts and to a number of ends. One avenue of interpretation asks how Jesus's secretive actions relate to the issue of honor.¹⁰⁸ Such has been the task of Watson, Malbon, and Winn. As previously noted, Watson argues that Mark's concealment passages are better understood as a countercultural approach to Mediterranean honor and shame than as a secrecy motif.¹⁰⁹ That is, in Mark, Jesus “engag[es] in a kind of ethical revisionism,” to redefine what it means for something to be honorable.¹¹⁰ In Mark's concealment passages specifically, Jesus is variously resisting achieved and ascribed honor. In 1:40–45; 5:21–24, 35–43; 7:31–37; and 8:22–26, Jesus resists public accolades and therefore refuses to accept the achieved honor people desire to give him in light of his great deeds. In 1:23–28, 1:34, and 3:12, Jesus prevents unclean spirits from identifying his ascribed status as an Israelite holy man and son of God. Watson suggests that Jesus pushes back against demonic influence that would have him seek glory for himself under the typical paradigm of human honor.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). Wrede believed that this notion developed in the early church in response to conflicting teachings: an older view that Jesus became messiah upon his resurrection and a more recent view that Jesus was actually messiah during his lifetime.

¹⁰⁸ Recall that in one article John Pilch connects Jesus's secretive behavior to avoidance of envy, and elsewhere he suggests that Jesus attempts to build his own fame (“Secrecy in the Gospel of Mark,” 150–53; “Secrecy in the Mediterranean World,” 151–57). Pilch does not persuade that either behavior makes sense in Jesus's ancient context. Honor-related concepts were discussed in conjunction with the “secret” as early as 1939, when H. J. Ebeling argued that Mark added the secrecy theme to his Gospel as a way to stress Jesus's glory and the irresistible nature of his fame (*Das Messiasgeheimnis und die Botschaft des Marcus-Evangelisten* [Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1939]).

¹⁰⁹ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 20–30, 38.

¹¹⁰ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 40. Cf. 39.

¹¹¹ Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 47–62.

Watson's argument has been critiqued for failing to account for passages in which Jesus is much more public with his deeds, which Watson himself finds unproblematic, citing a "rhetoric of indirection" in Mark.¹¹² For instance, Kelly R. Iverson is unconvinced that Watson's "analysis accounts for the various occasions where Jesus manifests his power via public display. The natural byproduct of these episodes is the conception of honor that Watson argues is rejected by Mark."¹¹³ Iverson continues, "Watson attributes this conflicting portrayal to the nature of orally derived texts, but he fails to appreciate that the depiction is not congruent with a primary characteristic of such literature: the concept of 'variation with the same.'"¹¹⁴

Unlike Iverson, Malbon actually finds the inconsistency in the Markan narrative unproblematic, but for different reasons than does Watson. In her own analysis of Mark, Malbon draws distinctions between Jesus's words/actions and the words/actions about Jesus that come from other characters, including the narrator. In Mark 1–8, Jesus powerfully and authoritatively proclaims and exemplifies God's rule (what Malbon refers to as Jesus's *enacted christology*). As a result, other narrative characters and even the narrator heap praise on Jesus and refer to him using titles of honor (Malbon's *projected christology*). Jesus responds, however, with deflected christology; rather than accepting the honor given to him, he "explicitly and consistently deflects honor from himself as both teacher and healer to God, who alone is good and who alone can do all things."¹¹⁵ Jesus also responds with refracted christology, in which he reshapes people's perceptions of him through his speech, especially using self-referential statements about the Son of Humanity, who is an individual

¹¹² Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 144–49.

¹¹³ Kelly R. Iverson, "Wherever the Gospel is Preached: The Paradox of Secrecy in the Gospel of Mark," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 181–209, esp. 188n35.

¹¹⁴ Iverson, "Wherever the Gospel is Preached," 188n35. Iverson quotes Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 148.

¹¹⁵ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, esp. 135.

and corporate figure of struggle and eventual victory.¹¹⁶ Malbon finds this behavior throughout the Gospel, and she explains the so-called messianic secret in terms of Jesus deflecting honor toward God. According to Malbon, the various christologies present in the Gospel are evidence of a tension, which has been created by the implied author of Mark, between Jesus and the narrator, a tension that the implied author does not mean to be resolved but is in itself a mystery of the Gospel regarding how Mark's implied audience should understand Jesus.¹¹⁷ Jesus is more reluctant to receive honor than the narrator and other characters, including God, are to attribute it to him.

At points in Mark's narrative, one wonders whether Jesus truly deflects honor as much as Malbon's argument suggests. Consider 2:1–12. Malbon argues that it is God, not Jesus, who forgives the man's sins in 2:5; Jesus attempts to deflect honor to God through use of the passive ("your sins are forgiven"), which Malbon reads as a divine passive. According to Malbon, Mark's scribes misunderstand Jesus and believe he is claiming to be the agent of forgiveness with his reference to the Son of Humanity in 2:10.¹¹⁸ In a longer discussion of the role of the Son of Humanity, Malbon describes the authority Jesus references as simply "*pronouncing* that sins are forgiven."¹¹⁹ In 2:10, however, Jesus refers to himself (the Son of Humanity) not as an authoritative herald but precisely as having "authority *to forgive* sins" (emphasis added).¹²⁰ Additionally, as Pascut has observed, Jesus's

¹¹⁶ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 195–210, esp. 201–203.

¹¹⁷ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 190–94. Cf. Malbon, "History, Theology, Story," 49–51. Malbon compares her argument to Watson and Iverson, appreciating the overlap and differences among their approaches. One critique she offers of Watson and Iverson is that they do not take into account the difference between the narrator and Jesus.

¹¹⁸ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 151–52.

¹¹⁹ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 199–201, esp. 201. Emphasis added. In discussing the representative nature of Jesus as Son of Humanity, however, she also asks, "Is it just Jesus who can forgive sins in the name of God, or is it human beings who have authority on earth to forgive sins in the name of God?" It is difficult to read this question as not contradicting her own argument.

¹²⁰ Pascut makes a strong case that Jesus is the agent of forgiveness in 2:1–12. Cf. Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus' Divinity*, part 3.

statement in 2:10 actually “draws attention to himself” rather than deflecting it toward God.¹²¹ If it were his intention to deflect attention to God, surely Jesus would ease the scribes’ concern by correcting their inference; instead, he speaks about his own authority.

In fact, Jesus’s three encounters with his opponents in Mark 2 bring the focus back to himself (consult Table 2 in the previous section “Gaining Opposition”). In 3:22–30 he analogously references himself. In other passages (3:1–6 and 7:1–13), the content of Jesus’s speech does not focus on himself, but the impact of his speech does: while also critiquing Jesus’s opponents, it positions him as authoritative interpreter of the scriptures. To be sure, Jesus is not *obsessed* with his own glory, and he often points to God’s activity in some way. For instance, in 3:30 he implies that the powerful spirit he has is the Holy Spirit, and in 7:6–13 he frequently references God and, by invoking Isaiah, indicates that the scribes and Pharisees dishonor God. Nonetheless, Jesus does draw attention to his own role as an authoritative agent of God and interpreter of scripture.

In Jesus’s interactions with his disciples, he may not always deflect honor to the degree that Malbon suggests. In 6:49–50, when Jesus’s disciples are afraid upon seeing him walk on the water, for they think he is an apparition, he says to them “Take courage! It is I (ἐγώ εἰμι); do not fear.” Commenting on this, Malbon states, “The Markan Jesus’ allusion to the voice of God from the burning bush (Exod 3:14), presenting both assurance and a commission to Moses, signals to the implied audience at least the scriptural background for understanding through whose power the sea is mastered and people are fed in the desert.”¹²² She goes on to note that this significance is lost on the disciples.¹²³ Even though the disciples do not understand, this does not discount the profound implication in Jesus’s statement on the story level. Rather than deflecting attention away from

¹²¹ Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus’ Divinity*, 159n7.

¹²² Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 141.

¹²³ Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 141.

himself or merely alluding to God, here Jesus draws a clear and powerful association between himself and God, taking on paradigmatic self-revelatory phraseology of God to identify himself.¹²⁴

On the whole, however, Malbon offers valuable insights about the behavior of Jesus throughout the Gospel and the layers of the Markan narrative. Jesus does not seek out his own personal honor, even though other characters—crowds, demons, the narrator, and even God—project honor upon him for his identity and deeds. While, in interactions with his opponents, and at times with his disciples, Jesus often asserts his power and authority in support of his honor, Jesus is not characterized by *philotimia*, or love of honor. For Malbon, the implied author's aims are crucial for all of this, as they introduce complexity, even mystery, into one's understanding of Jesus. One might add that this has an overall narrative effect of building Jesus's honor without portraying him as self-obsessed. Importantly, though, even the character Jesus does not reject the affirmations of God, nor does he reject the acclamations of the demons, even if he does silence them.

Nonetheless, Mark, beyond presenting a tension among Jesus, the narrator, and the implied author, also seems to present a tension in Jesus's own behavior. Why *does* Jesus sometimes seem at least indifferent to honor and other times not? In addressing this question, Winn's work is particularly useful. Recall that Winn agrees with Watson that the secrecy motif in Mark is best understood as Jesus's intentional resistance to honor; however, Winn does not believe such resistance is an inversion of cultural notions of honor. Instead, according to Winn, Jesus's behavior must be understood against the specific backdrop of Roman rulers resisting honor.¹²⁵

Beginning with Augustus, those who held the principate tended to reject certain public honors that might be perceived as excessive (*recusatio*) to prevent violating Roman sensibilities and

¹²⁴ It is difficult to evaluate how attuned to this reference a non-Jewish audience would be, but the reference is present nonetheless.

¹²⁵ Winn, "Resisting Honor," 583–601.

appearing arrogant and tyrannical.¹²⁶ Augustus resists certain public honors according to Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and his own *Res gestae*.¹²⁷ Tiberius, Vespasian, and Claudius are often portrayed acting similarly.¹²⁸ Conversely, Julius Caesar and Caligula are both criticized for accepting excessive honors.¹²⁹ Winn argues that the refusal of honors deemed excessive was a response to a particularly Roman republican sentiment: too much honor and power were offensive.¹³⁰ Drawing upon this cultural sentiment, Mark depicts Jesus as being modest in the degree of honor he receives, accepting honor at some points but resisting it at others. As such, Mark likens Jesus to Roman rulers in an effort to demonstrate “that Jesus is the true ‘Son of God’ and true ruler of the world.”¹³¹

By contextualizing Jesus’s concealing behavior in terms of Roman honor resistance, Winn also offers a fruitful avenue for understanding both Jesus’s behavior in Mark and the Gospel author’s purposes in so depicting him. While *recusatio* was a tactic of Roman rulers, though, it is also the case that modest behavior, what Barton refers to as [positive] “shame and measure,” was important for Roman honor more broadly.¹³² To explain “shame and measure,” Barton draws upon

¹²⁶ For more on *recusatio*, consult Wallace-Hadrill, “Civilis Princeps,” 32–48, upon whom Winn draws.

¹²⁷ Suetonius, *Aug.* 52.1–2, 53.1; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 52.35; *Res gest. divi Aug.* 5, 4, 24. So consult Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 590–91.”

¹²⁸ Suetonius, *Tib.* 24.1, 26.1–2; *Vesp.* 12; *Claud.* 12.1; and Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 57.2.1, 57.8.1, 57.9.1, 60.3.2, 60.5.4; So consult Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 591–92.

Although not exclusively the case, such rejection of honors could be particularly important when they were divine honors, especially in the western empire. In Italy, direct worship or divination of living emperors was frowned upon for some time, although this did not always hold true (Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 168–70). For instance, Tacitus explains that Tiberius resisted being worshipped as divine, allowing only that he be renowned after his death (*Ann.* 4.37–38). According to Tacitus, however, Tiberius’s behavior prompted mixed reactions: “To some this was modesty [*modestiam*], to many, *He doesn’t believe in himself*. And there were people to whom it signified worthless [*degeneris*] character. *The best mortals have the loftiest desires. This is why Hercules and Liber, of the Greeks, and Quirinus, for us, are numbered among the gods*” (*Ann.* 4.38.4–5 [Damon]). Thus, some preferred that emperors accept such high honors only sparingly or not at all, but others were of the opinion that someone as great as an emperor ought to embrace such high honors.

¹²⁹ Suetonius, *Jul.* 76.1; *Cal.* 22.1–3; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 44.4–6; So consult Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 593.

¹³⁰ Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 589–93.

¹³¹ Winn, “Resisting Honor,” 599.

¹³² Barton, *Roman Honor*, 210.

an example from Pliny the Elder, who recounts a competition between two illusionist painters. The first, Zeuxis, painted grapes and fooled nearby birds before asking the second, Parrhasius, to reveal his own painting from behind the curtain concealing it. The curtain, however, *was* the painting. “And when he [Zeuxis] realized his mistake, with a modesty that did him honour he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had deceived birds Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist” (*Nat.* 35.36.65 [Rackham, LCL]). Barton explains, “Zeuxis’s moderate measure of himself (presumably coincident with, or even more modest than, that of his audience) brought him credit. It rendered him creditable, trustworthy. He was not arrogant; he did not take for himself more than he was thought to deserve....One’s shame created a debt-bond, a favorable balance of credit, when society would give you more than you took for yourself.”¹³³ In Roman thinking, tending to boundaries was an exercise in shame that ultimately built honor.

Whether they are understood in light of ruler honor or Roman honor sentiments more generally, Jesus’s concealment commands in Mark build his honor on both the story and the discourse level. By sometimes commanding people and spirits not to broadcast his deeds and identity, Jesus does not “take for himself more than he [is] thought to deserve,” as Barton puts the issue. To other characters and to the narrative audience, Jesus signals that he is not obsessed with his own glory, although he *does* strategically allow his honor to be emphasized at times, especially when he faces antagonistic challenges. The narrative audience witnesses Jesus’s modest behavior more often than the narrative’s characters do, and it is the narrative audience who is more likely to make the connections between Jesus and Roman emperors. The overall effect is that Jesus’s great deeds, impressive identity, and authoritative role are emphasized, but in a palatable way.¹³⁴

¹³³ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 210–11, esp. 211.

¹³⁴ As such, contra Malbon, Jesus’s behaviors are not best described as countercultural, since both his acceptance and his resistance of honor fall within cultural norms of the day.

Jesus's concealment commands in Mark 1–8 make sense in light of the issue of honor and particularly in light of Roman sentiments of modesty and honor resistance. An additional word is in order regarding Jesus's attempts at privacy in 1:35–39, 6:31–32, and 7:24–30. In these passages, which have sometimes been included in discussions of the “secrecy” motif, Jesus does not command silence but instead seeks to get away from the crowds, who are often so zealous for Jesus that they physically overtake him. Jesus's behavior has a few significances. First, it sometimes seems to be a tactic of self-preservation. In 6:31 Jesus wants to ensure that he and his disciples have the opportunity to eat (cf. 3:20). Second, Jesus's behavior suggests that he does not intentionally seek out or bask in crowds in order to further his own honor.¹³⁵ Third, and relatedly, by seeking time alone, sometimes to pray (1:35; 6:46), Jesus is portrayed as a man of virtue who centers himself not in fame but in God. Overall, Jesus's “secretive” behaviors contribute to his honor in Mark's Gospel.

Conclusion

Beginning with 1:1 and extending through 8:26, the Gospel of Mark builds Jesus's honor on both the story and the discourse levels of the narrative. Jesus gains a strong reputation among the public and repeatedly displays his goodness and greatness—though with modesty. Jesus's honor is also emphasized in less public ways: among his disciples, in small settings, and even among unclean spirits. Such interactions feature Jesus's honor especially for the narrative audience. Throughout these chapters, when challenged, Jesus bests his challengers, simultaneously putting them in their place and demonstrating his own honor. In so doing, Jesus proves himself to excel above his

¹³⁵ This behavior has parallels with Roman emperor's consideration of the masses. While popularity among the mob was important, it also had to be balanced with popularity among the city's elite. Being well liked among a city's plebs gained the emperor esteem among the plebs *and*, to a degree, among the city's elite, but only if the emperor's friendliness with the mob adhered to certain restraints. Thus, Nero and Commodus crossed a line by publicly performing for the masses. Another way to overstep appropriate boundaries with the city's commoners (in the perspective of the elite) was over-generosity. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 124.

challengers.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, a major narrative shift occurs at 8:27, when Jesus begins a journey that will eventually lead him to Jerusalem and when he begins to speak prophetically about the suffering that awaits him there.

¹³⁶ Cf. Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 33.

CHAPTER 5

MOMENTUM AND ANTICIPATION: MARK 8:27–14:31

Beginning with 8:27 and continuing through 14:31, Mark anticipates a change of fortunes—and its eventual resolution—for Jesus. To be sure, Mark retains an emphasis on Jesus’s honor. Jesus receives divine affirmation, continues to demonstrate his power and glory, maintains his popularity, and frequently outwits his opponents in public challenges. Even so, Jesus repeatedly speaks prophetically to his followers about suffering, death, and resurrection yet to come for him. He also speaks formatively and prophetically about the lifestyle and suffering his followers can expect. Thus, if 1:1–8:26 emphasizes Jesus’s honor, 8:27–14:31 continues the momentum of Jesus’s honor but also anticipates events that are yet to unfold, many of which entail shame.

Honor and Shame in Mark’s Narrative Flow

The presence of a narrative shift at Mark 8:27 is well attested among scholars. Discussing who Jesus is and what it means for the disciples to follow him, R. T. France reports that 8:27–33 “is conventionally said to be the watershed in Mark’s narrative.”¹ In light of this shift, redaction critics have often understood 8:22–10:52 to offer a corrective Christology to Mark 1:1–8:21 in anticipation of Jesus’s passion. That is, in 8:22–10:52 the Gospel corrects the notion that Jesus’s messiahship is defined by power and glory, insisting instead that the true meaning of Jesus’s messiahship is found in his suffering and crucifixion. Winn observes a distinct but similar tendency among narrative critics: “While narrative critics have rejected such a ‘corrective’ reading of this section, the vast majority still

¹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 327.

attribute greater christological significance to Mark's central section than they do Mark's Galilean ministry."² In these interpretations, "truly *seeing* Jesus involves seeing him in terms of his suffering and death, while blindness is associated with seeing Jesus in terms of power and glory—the Markan Jesus is Messiah primarily in terms of the former rather than the latter."³

As previously discussed, Winn rejects such a conclusion, arguing instead that the central section of Mark introduces the idea that Jesus's suffering and death are important parts of his messianic identity, which the disciples struggle to grasp; however, according to Winn, this section does not represent a shift away from Jesus's power and glory toward a *more* important emphasis on suffering. Mark 1:1–8:21 promotes Jesus's power, and this emphasis also continues during and after 8:22–10:52. Winn insists, "Any narrative assessment of Mark's Christology must affirm both poles of Mark's presentation of Jesus."⁴ While a few narrative critics, including Malbon, have affirmed Mark's emphasis on both Jesus's glory and his suffering, such critics "ultimately propose an irreconcilable tension" between them, whereas Winn argues that it is preferable to find "a unity between the two."⁵ In order to accomplish such a reading, Winn believes the interpreter cannot rely solely on narrative criticism. "If one approaches the text through the methods of narrative criticism, that is, without significant concern for the original setting of the Gospel, then there is little recourse for resolving this narrative tension when the text itself provides no perceivable way forward."⁶ Instead, he suggests, the way forward is to appeal to Roman political ideology and the historical context to which Mark 10:42–45, which he considers the epitome of Mark's central section, refers.

² Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 92.

³ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 92.

⁴ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 94. Again, Winn's stance represents an adjustment of his previous argument, which emphasized only Jesus's honor. Cf. Winn, *Purpose of Mark's Gospel*.

⁵ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 94.

⁶ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 94.

Winn argues that, read in light of Roman ideological commitment to self-rule, rejection of tyranny, and expectation for *recusatio* from Roman rulers, Mark 10:42–45 instructs Jesus’s disciples that he is not only the powerful messiah emphasized in the first half of the Gospel; he is also a messiah who takes upon himself humility, service, and sacrifice, as the second half of the Gospel emphasizes. Importantly, “the cross does not contradict or stand in tension with the tremendous power of Jesus, power that evinces Jesus’ identity as God’s appointed ruler. Instead, the cross is presented as the ideal way in which a ruler would and should exercise divinely granted authority.”⁷ Jesus’s suffering and death are contextualized as acts of generous benefaction and service, which Mark’s Roman audience would expect from their own rulers. Even Jesus’s crucifixion, then, supports Mark’s presentation of Jesus as the true ruler of the world contra Vespasian. Roman Christians, who had “already accepted the shame of the cross” and thus for whom crucifixion didn’t have the “same shameful sting” as it would for other Romans, would be willing to accept this pairing of Roman political ideology with crucifixion.⁸ Further, such an audience would understand Jesus’s prophetic abilities to signal divine power. In all, in Winn’s view, Mark’s central section mitigates the coming shame for Jesus and provides an opportunity for Jesus to embody service more impressively than Vespasian. Effectively, “in Mark’s central section Jesus further out-Caesars Caesar.”⁹

I agree with Winn that, in these central chapters (which I extend to include 8:27–14:31), the Gospel of Mark does not shift toward *promoting* Jesus’s suffering over his power and glory. As Winn observes, the first eight chapters of Mark are not there simply as a foil for what is to come; rather,

⁷ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 115.

⁸ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 111.

⁹ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 115–16, esp. 116. Winn also argues (112–14) that Jesus is not really a king in Mark. He adopts Malbon’s perspective that those who call Jesus *king* are wrong, arguing that this narrative feature makes even more sense in light of and because of Roman political ideology. He does not, however, consider “king” to have negative connotations in Mark’s discourse, as Malbon does. Cf. Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 119–20. But consult my treatment of Jesus’s triumphal entry (11:1–11) and his questioning by Pilate (15:1–5) in this chapter and the next, respectively.

they build a robust repertoire of honor for Jesus, as I demonstrated in chapter 4. Instead, these chapters—at least in part—do introduce the importance of humility, sacrifice, and service alongside power and glory. I would even suggest that humility, sacrifice, and service are promoted as important, virtuous manifestations of power and glory.¹⁰ Nonetheless, I am not convinced we can presume that Roman Christians had already accepted the shame of the cross, thus making Jesus’s crucifixion less problematic for a first-century audience. On the contrary, Mark 8:38 seems to suggest that Jesus’s suffering and crucifixion invoke feelings of shame in his followers. Further, I hold that the latter part of Mark’s narrative temporarily shifts away from a focus on Jesus’s power and glory toward a *focus on* (but not promotion of) Jesus’s shame more than Winn acknowledges. This shift is foreshadowed in 8:27–14:31, though it materializes in narrative events only beginning with 14:32–51. Jesus’s suffering and crucifixion do not ultimately contradict or minimize Jesus’s power, but this can only be fully appreciated as the narrative resolves.

Relatedly, I disagree with Winn’s claim that a narrative reading of Mark makes it difficult, even imperceivable, to resolve a tension between the emphasis on Jesus’s honor in the first half of Mark and the emphasis on his suffering that develops beginning with 8:27–33. Again, while I find a generally contextualized interpretative approach to be insightful, is it not necessary to tie the Gospel to a specific historical situation (here Vespasian’s political propaganda) in order to arrive at a cohesive narrative reading. On the contrary, a narrative reading of Mark reveals that, after Jesus’s honor is established in 1:1–8:26, Mark 8:27–14:31 creates suspense by anticipating that Jesus will undergo a major status reversal entailing intense suffering and shame before being vindicated.¹¹

¹⁰ Though this does not automatically mean that the cross becomes “the ideal way” for a ruler to exercise authority, à la Winn. In fact, while I think the Gospel is ultimately ambiguous with regard to the extent of divine involvement in Jesus’s suffering and death, St. Clair makes a compelling case that Mark emphasizes the cross as the evil result of human attempts to shame Jesus rather than being representative of the will of God (*Call and Consequences*, 109–64). Thus, the cross is not the ideal way for a ruler to exercise authority. Rather, piety, faithfulness, and a true understanding of virtue that all lead to a willingness to go even to the cross are ideal expressions of authority.

Because of Jesus's eventual vindication, the Gospel ultimately promotes Jesus's honor on the discourse and, to an extent, story levels over the whole narrative arc, but only by way of resolving the shame featured so heavily in 14:32–15:37.

Mark's narrative arc—which builds the protagonist's honor, then features the protagonist's loss of status entailing suffering and shame, and eventually rebuilds the protagonist's honor—has strong parallels with plot trajectories of the early Greek novels. Take, for instance, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*.¹² The protagonists Chaereas and Callirhoe are individuals of high status and honor who undergo significant status reversals and a great deal of suffering throughout the narrative only to have their status and relationship restored at the novel's end. Here, Chaereas serves as a useful example of the storyline as it relates to honor, suffering and shame, and restoration.

The beginning of *Callirhoe* quickly and firmly establishes Chaereas's honor. He is introduced as “preeminently fair of form above all” and is likened to Achilles, Nireus, Hippolytus, and Alcibiades (1.1 [my trans.]).¹³ Chaereas's father is the second most prominent man in Syracuse, ranked behind his political rival Hermocrates, the father of Callirhoe. Because of his high status and public favor, when Chaereas falls in love with Callirhoe, the assembly members successfully petition Hermocrates to permit the two to marry. The people describe them as “worthy of each other” (1.1 [Reardon]), and Chariton compares their wedding to that of Thetis and Pelion.¹⁴

¹¹ As such, these chapters are not intended primarily to mitigate Jesus's coming shame but to anticipate it. They also motivate followers in the narrative and its audience toward a particular ethical approach to life.

¹² Recall that the dates of the early Greek novels are debated, but Bowie argues that *Callirhoe* was written ca. 50–70 CE (“Chronology,” 47–63).

¹³ All four of these legendary men were extremely handsome men of high status, Alcibiades being an aristocrat, Hippolytus the son of a mythical king, Nireus a king himself, and Achilles the son of a human king and of the Nereid Thetis. B. P. Reardon, Introduction and Notes to *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, in Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 17–124, esp. 22n4.

¹⁴ Already Callirhoe's great beauty, high status, and growing fame have been established in 1.1.

Chaereas's good favor changes, however, as a "malicious divine power" begins to work against him (1.1 [my trans.]). Failed suitors of Callirhoe unite to destroy Chaereas and sabotage his marriage with Callirhoe; employing the divine entities Jealousy and Love, they trick Chaereas into believing Callirhoe is unfaithful to him. Chaereas responds with a violent attack on Callirhoe, who seems to die but is instead buried alive and subsequently kidnapped by graverobbers.

From here throughout most of the novel, Chaereas experiences loss of status and repeated trials, suffering, and demeaning shame. Learning that Callirhoe is still living but is now a slave, he sets out to find her, vowing to Poseidon, "If I cannot recover my wife, I want to be with her even as a slave!" (3.5 [Reardon]). Indeed, Chaereas is soon sold into slavery. Because "suffering, neglect, chains, and most of all love" render him incapable of working (4.2 [my trans.]), he is beaten and "shamefully mistreated" (*προπηλακίζόμενον αἰσχροῶς*; 4.2.2 [my trans.]). Later, he is wrongfully implicated in an attempted prison break and condemned to be crucified. In an elaborate turn of events, Chaereas is spared crucifixion and brought face to face with Callirhoe, but his suffering and humiliation are far from over. He is publicly defamed by Callirhoe's owner and now-husband Dionysius and is forced to fight for his relationship with Callirhoe at trial (5.8). He is also undermined by the Persian king, who secretly attempts to take Callirhoe for himself. At this point, Chaereas believes Callirhoe has betrayed him and considers himself worse off than when he was a slave (5.10.6). Twice he attempts suicide.

In this midst of Chaereas's shameful afflictions, glimpses of his honor remain. Despite Chaereas's worries and unbeknownst to him, Callirhoe repeatedly honors him. When Callirhoe thinks he is dead, she holds a public funeral for him: "So Callirhoe was burying Chaereas in Miletus while Chaereas was working in Caria in chains" (4.2 [Reardon]). Later, she defends him to the Persian king's servant Artaxates: "Chaereas is nobly born! He is the foremost man in a city that even Athens could not overcome—and Athens overcame that Great King of yours at Marathon and

Salamis!” (6.7 [Reardon]). Chaereas also has the favor of some among the public during his trial with Dionysius. Awaiting the king’s arbitration between Chaereas and Dionysius, half the city supports Chaereas, citing his rightful place as her husband (6.1).¹⁵

Despite these clearly positive components of the narrative, the overarching plot progression features Chaereas’s trials, suffering, and shame.¹⁶ Near the end of the narrative, however, a sudden change occurs when rebellion breaks out in Egypt and all Persia is sent to war. Chaereas fights for Egypt against Persia, both in revenge for all that has transpired and in order to die gloriously at war. Instead of dying, Chaereas is highly successful, earning esteem among the Egyptians. Further, he regains the favor of Aphrodite, who has been a cause of his suffering:

[Aphrodite] was growing less angry with him. At first she had been incensed by his misplaced jealousy: she had given him the fairest of gifts [that is, Callirhoe], fairer even than the gift she had accorded to Alexander Paris, and he had repaid her kindness with arrogance. But now that Chaereas had made honorable amends to Love, in that he had wandered the world from west to east and gone through untold suffering, Aphrodite took pity on him; having harassed by land and sea the handsome couple she had originally brought together, she decided now to reunite them. (8.1 [Reardon])

Aphrodite does indeed reunite Chaereas and Callirhoe. Their servile status is reversed, they are restored to the Persian king’s favor, and they return home to a people who praises them and longs to hear the tale of Chaereas’s travels, which may have entailed suffering and humiliation but “has ended brilliantly” and “overshadows all the earlier events” (8.7 [Reardon]).

This pattern of status reversals (high, low, high; honor, shame, honor) is not unique to Chaereas—as Callirhoe experiences a similar trajectory—or even to this particular novel. Philip Harland, discussing Callirhoe, observes her violence-infused status reversal from noble to slave that “then initiates the ongoing fateful wanderings and the ultimate recovery of noble status and marital

¹⁵ Additionally, Chaereas’s friend Polycharmus faithfully remains by his side through all his trials.

¹⁶ More broadly, the overarching plot progression emphasizes the barriers to Chaereas and Callirhoe reuniting, which are exacerbated by status reversals for both characters.

union *that are so necessary to the plot of virtually all of the surviving novels.*”¹⁷ The suffering and status reversals the characters experience are not mutually exclusive with continued experiences of honor, but the novels stress the protagonists’ shameful loss of status until the narrative denouement.

In another novel, *An Ephesian Tale*, foreshadowing and prophecy of the suffering, shame, and eventual restoration in store for the protagonists create suspense about the novel plot, just as they do in Mark. The protagonists in *Ephesian Tale* learn of their coming sufferings and eventual restoration through an oracle:

Why do you long to learn the end of a malady, and its beginning?
One disease has both in its grasp, and from that the remedy must be accomplished.
But for them I see terrible sufferings and toils that are endless;
Both will flee over the sea pursued by madness;
They will suffer chains at the hands of men who mingle with the waters;
And a tomb shall be the burial chamber for both, and fire the destroyer;
And beside the water of the river Nile, to holy Isis
The savior you will afterwards offer rich gifts;
But still after their sufferings a better fate is in store. (1.6 [Anderson])

As Aldo Tagliabue argues, this oracle, spoken first to the parents of protagonists Habrocomes and Anthia, serves as a *mise-en-abyme* (an abbreviated version of the story within the story) and is “meant to generate *suspense* about the protagonists’ future, a reaction that from the parents [who initially receive the oracle] extends to the protagonists and in turn to the readers of the novel.”¹⁸ Noting that *Ephesian Tale* draws to a close with a sacrificial thanksgiving to Isis in Rhodes rather than Egypt (as the oracle indicates), Tagliabue reads the oracle’s ending as an external prolepsis, which “projects

¹⁷ Philip A. Harland, “‘Do Not Deny Me This Noble Death’: Depictions of Violence in the Greek Novels and Apocryphal Acts,” *AN* 14 (2017): 1–19, esp. 6. Emphasis added.

¹⁸ Aldo Tagliabue, *Xenophon’s Ephesiaca: A Paraliterary Love-Story from the Ancient World*, ANS 22 (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2017), 60. Against a scholarly tendency to read this oracle as inconsistent with the larger plot of *Ephesian Tale*, Tagliabue builds upon both Tomas Hägg’s argument that the oracle is meant to incite curiosity and Tim Whitmarsh’s interpretation that the oracle invites curiosity and “pleasure in indeterminacy.” So consult Hägg, *Narrative Technique in Ancient Greek Romances: Studies of Chariton, Xenophon Ephesiaca, and Achilles Tatius* (Stockholm: Lund, 1971), 230; Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel: Returning Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 201.

into the unnarrated future the protagonists' shared life."¹⁹ Thus, a restoration of fortunes not only takes place in the narrative as prophesied but is also reinforced by the implied continuation of faithful love beyond the scope of the story, suggested by the prophesied sacrifice to Isis on the Nile.²⁰ This foreshadowed restoration will be realized only after the prophesied period of humiliating and intense suffering.

The similar plot trajectories and literary techniques found in the Greek novels and Mark can help clarify Mark's portrayal of Jesus. On the one hand, the Gospel does not correct or subordinate the powerful and honored Jesus to the suffering Jesus. On the other hand, neither does the Gospel downplay the shame of the suffering Jesus experiences. The narrative promotes Jesus's honor as something that is jeopardized and then restored *after* intensely shameful suffering.

In this chapter and the two to follow, I discuss the implications of Jesus's loss and restoration of honor as Mark's narrative unfolds. For the purposes of the present chapter, the prophetic parallel with *Ephesian Tale* merits further consideration. The oracle concerning Habrocomes and Anthia occurs at a point in the novel when things are otherwise going well for the couple. Their lives are so pleasant that they cannot be bothered by looming travails. Habrocomes is "not at all afraid of the prophecies," and Anthia does "not care" with Habrocomes by her side (1.7 [Anderson]). In fact, "their whole life was a festival, everything was full of enjoyment, and already they had forgotten even the oracle" (1.10 [Anderson]). The narrator reminds the audience, however, that "fate had not forgotten, nor had the god overlooked his plans" (1.10 [Anderson]). As *Ephesian Tale* progresses, the couple does indeed experience the prophesied suffering and loss of status until their status is restored and they are reunited near the narrative's end.

¹⁹ Tagliabue, *Xenophon's Ephesiaca*, 61–62, esp. 62. Tagliabue draws upon the following definition of external prolepsis: "a flash-forward to an event which lies outside the time span of the main story." Irene J. F. de Jong and René Nünlist, eds. *Time in Ancient Greek Literature*, Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), XI.

²⁰ Tagliabue, *Xenophon's Ephesiaca*, 75–77.

Similarly, in the Gospel of Mark, before Jesus experiences shame and loss of status, he repeatedly prophesies about the suffering and shame that are to come, noting also the eventual resolution of his plight: resurrection and, even more eventually, returning as the Son of Humanity. These repeated prophecies occur during a portion of the narrative in which he is otherwise enjoying continued momentum of his honor. As such, Jesus's honor remains an emphasis at the same time that suspense builds concerning shameful trials and their eventual resolution. I now turn to an analysis of such features of Mark's Gospel in 8:27–14:31.

The Continued Momentum of Jesus's Honor

In a very clear sense, Mark 8:27–14:31 continues to feature Jesus's honor in keeping with the momentum established in 1:1–8:26.²¹ Jesus receives honors reserved for rulers and emperors. He acts powerfully and benevolently on behalf of others. He is featured as wise and authoritative teacher and captivates crowds. He establishes his authority in Jerusalem and the temple, the paradigmatic center of Jewish life and cult, over and against the current Jerusalem leadership, whom he critiques and against whom he masterfully defends himself when challenged. Through it all, Jesus demonstrates virtue and, relatedly, modesty. In 8:27–14:31, Jesus maintains his illustrious *persona*.

Divine(ly Sanctioned) Status

In keeping with the divine affirmation established at the start of Mark, in these chapters the Gospel once again affirms Jesus's divine and emperor-like status as son of God. Also emphasized is Jesus's divinely sanctioned status as messiah of Israel. Such affirmations, which only a few characters witness, build Jesus's status for those characters and reinforce it for the narrative audience.

²¹ It should be noted, however, that beginning with ch. 14, Jesus is no longer portrayed in public settings, and the narrative inches closer to his suffering and shame.

While on the way to Caesarea Philippi (8:27–30), Jesus’s disciples tell him that he is esteemed by the populace as a prophetic figure, whether people think he is John the Baptist reincarnate or Elijah or another prophet. Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, in response to which Peter declares Jesus to be someone even greater: the anticipated messiah of Israel. Although Jesus commands his disciples to silence on this matter, it is clear that they consider him not only a respectable teacher and healer but also a divinely ordained powerful and honored agent for Israel.²²

In the next scene, which takes place six days later on a mountain, Peter, James, and John witness Jesus being transfigured (μετεμορφώθη). Jesus’s clothes become “shining white, exceedingly so” to the point that “no one on earth who cleans cloth is able to whiten to such an extent” (9:3). When Moses and Elijah appear alongside Jesus, Peter suggests that he, James, and John, who are “greatly afraid,” build tents (σκηνάς) for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (9:5–6). As if in response to Peter, the divine voice speaks: “This is my son, the beloved; listen to him” (9:7). For a second time in Mark, Jesus’s divine sonship—and therefore his divine and ruler-like status—is affirmed directly by God, and here the affirmation is witnessed by a group of Jesus’s disciples.

Peter recognizes this event to reveal Jesus’s greatness. He refers to Jesus as ῥαββί, his master.²³ He desires to build σκηνάς for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in order to honor them. Though often used to refer simply to a shelter, σκηνή could also refer to a tent for festivals or, in Jewish thinking, the dwelling place of God in Israel’s past, complete with an altar for sacrifices.²⁴ Thus, Peter may be attempting to establish a cult or hold a religious festival. Such a response to Jesus’s transformation would make sense in a Greco-Roman context. As Collins avers, “In antiquity, the

²² I return to this passage in the section “Passion Prophecies” later in this chapter.

²³ “ῥαββί,” *LSJ*, 1562; ῥαββί is a loanword from the Hebrew רַבִּי, itself derived from רַבב, “to be or become many/much.” “רַבב,” *BDB*, 912.

²⁴ “σκηνή,” *LSJ*, 1608. Cf. Euripides, *Ion*, 806; Exod 26:1 LXX.

epiphany of a deity was regularly associated with the foundation of a cult or with the celebration of a festival.”²⁵ Collins argues that the Jesus’s transfiguration echoes stories of Greek gods such as Apollo, Athena, and Demeter appearing on earth disguised as humans. Especially noteworthy is Demeter’s transformation from a wet nurse into her glorious self, with light emanating from her skin (*Hymn to Demeter* 275–80).²⁶

Another striking parallel occurs in Roman literature. In book 8 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter and Mercury visit earth in disguise. Seeking shelter, they cannot find anyone to take them in except a humble elderly couple, Baucis and Philemon, who offer their best hospitality, meager as their circumstances are. Jupiter and Mercury reveal that they are gods and beckon the couple to hike up a nearby mountain with them. Just before reaching the top, Baucis and Philemon turn to see their entire town below covered with water; their house alone survives, now a temple to the gods. When Jupiter and Mercury offer to grant them a wish for their deeds, Baucis and Philemon ask to be priests of the gods’ temple and to die together (8.626–710). As in *Metamorphoses*, in Mark one finds a mountain, an epiphanic experience, and a holy place in which to establish cult. Such intertextual echoes further reinforce the notion of Jesus’s divinity for Mark’s narrative audience.²⁷

Public Power, Authority, and Virtue

In Mark 8:27–12:43, Jesus continues to gain honor in a more public sense as well. As before, crowds are often with Jesus (consult Table 3). They greet him enthusiastically (9:15), accompany him on his journey out of Jericho (10:46), welcome him into Jerusalem (11:8–10), and are taught by him

²⁵ Collins, *Mark*, 418–19.

²⁶ Collins, *Mark*, 418. Cf. Collins, “Son of God among Greeks and Romans,” 90–92, esp. 92. Collins concludes, “From the point of view of traditional Greek religion, the identification of Jesus in this scene as God’s son is equivalent to identifying him as a divine being.”

²⁷ For a treatment of epiphany in the Greek novels, consult Tomas Hägg, “Epiphany in the Greek Novels: The Emplotment of a Metaphor,” *Eranos* 100 (2002): 51–61.

(8:34; 10:1; 11:18; 12:12, 37; likely 11:32). In one scene (10:13–16), people bring their children to Jesus for blessing.²⁸ The crowds that accompany Jesus witness his healing of Bartimaeus (10:46–52) and probably his verbal spars with Jewish leaders in 10:1–12, 11:27–33, and 12:1–12.²⁹ Not only do they experience Jesus’s power and authority, the crowds also *come* to Jesus because of his reputation. For example, in 9:14–15 the “great crowd” that sees Jesus is immediately “amazed” (ἐξεθαμβήθησαν) by his presence and runs to greet him. A member of the crowd, who has brought his son to Jesus for an exorcism and refers to him as “teacher,” attests to Jesus’s reputation as healer and teacher. In this section, I highlight certain scenes that feature Jesus’s public honor in 8:27–10:52. In such scenes, Jesus continues to demonstrate his power to heal and exorcise, his authority to teach, his virtue, and his ability to defend his honor when challenged. Most, but not all, take place in the presence of crowds.

Table 3: Jesus and Crowds in Mark 8:27–12:43

Passage	Crowd Identifiers	Role of Crowd
8:27–9:1	The crowd (τὸν ὄχλον)	Taught by Jesus
9:14–29	A great crowd (ὄχλον πλὸν)	Amazed (ἐξεθαμβήθησαν); runs to greet him
10:1–12	Crowds (ὄχλοι)	Gather around Jesus; are taught by him
10:13–16	They	Bring little children so that Jesus will touch them
10:46–52	Considerable crowd (ὄχλου ἱκανοῦ)	Leaves Jericho with Jesus and his disciples
11:1–11	Many people (πολλοί)	Welcome him into Jerusalem, lay branches, shout praise
11:15–19	The crowd (ὁ ὄχλος)	Taught by Jesus, amazed (ἐξεπλήσσετο)
11:27–33	The crowd (τὸν ὄχλον)	With Jesus in the temple (being taught?)
12:1–12	The crowd (τὸν ὄχλον)	With Jesus in the temple as he tells a parable
12:35–40	The great crowd (ὁ πλὺς ὄχλος)	Taught by Jesus; listens with pleasure (ἡδέως)

²⁸ As in some previous passages (e.g., 1:21–28, 40–45), the crowd is indicated using the ambiguous “they” included in the third-person plural verb form. Consult Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 9–16: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT, ed. Martin M. Culy (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 46. Cf. Decker, *Mark 1–8*, xxv–xxvi, 25–26.

In Mark 1–8, Jesus’s touch is often associated with healing (1:41; 3:10; 5:27–31; 6:56; 7:33; 8:22); such is also the case in 9:27, when Jesus raises a son from apparent death. In 10:13–16, instead of being associated with healing, Jesus’s touch is associated with blessing. Jesus embraces the children, lays his hands on them, and blesses them (10:16).

²⁹ It is possible, though not at all clear, that 10:2–12 is intended to be a separate scene from 10:1.

When Jesus performs yet another exorcism in 9:14–29, his powerful abilities are displayed before the crowd. Although he has granted his disciples authority over unclean spirits (6:7), they are unable to cast out this spirit. By contrast, when he commands the spirit to leave the son, it obeys. Its expulsion is so violent that afterwards the son appears to be dead, but Jesus “took him by the hand and raised him, and he arose” (9:27). Here, Jesus’s power over death is suggested, since the son seems all but dead. On the discourse level, the narrative audience recalls that Jesus has already raised the dead (5:35–43), so his power to overcome a difficult spirit and near death is unsurprising.³⁰ This scene also highlights Jesus’s virtue when his disciples privately ask him why they could not perform the exorcism and he responds, “This kind can go out by nothing except prayer” (9:29).

In 10:46–52 Jesus acts publicly as a powerful healer. A man named Bartimaeus, who is blind and a beggar, calls out to Jesus for mercy. Twice, Bartimaeus, whose name means “son of a highly prized one,” refers to Jesus as “son of David,” drawing attention to his own status and that of Jesus. If his father, Timaeus, is actually highly prized, such status seems to be of no use to Bartimaeus, as he is a beggar. Jesus, on the other hand, *does* enjoy high status as son of David. Bartimaeus understands that Jesus, this great man who is “my master” (Παββουνι, 9:51) and is in a position to “have mercy on me” (10:47, 48), is a kingly messianic figure, and he proclaims it publicly.³¹ Jesus

³⁰ Interestingly, in 5:35–43, the girl is reported as dead, although Jesus says that she is merely “sleeping” (5:39). Here, the son becomes stiff “as if dead,” and some think him dead, but Jesus does not say whether he is actually dead. Yet again, Jesus’s healing might remind the narrative audience of the healing abilities and insight of Asclepiades (Celsus, *On Medicine* 2.6.16–18; Apuleius, *Flor.* 19).

³¹ Cf. Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 87–91; M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 304–7. Malbon, drawing also on Boring, argues that Bartimaeus’s proclamation of Jesus as son of David is incorrect: (1) Bartimaeus calls Jesus “son of David” while still blind and beside, rather than on, the way; (2) the son of David was expected to be from Bethlehem, while the Gospel associates Jesus with Nazareth; (3) neither the narrator nor other characters adopt this appellation for Jesus, and neither Jesus nor the narrator responds to the association with David in 11:1–11; and (4) Rabbouni, which he eventually calls Jesus, is an intensified form of Rabbi, a term of respect but one associated with failure in Mark. Malbon herself claims to be focused on the internal narrative evidence regarding son of David, so it is not clear to me that the traditional (read: extra-Markan) association of the son of David with Bethlehem is relevant here. I do not find Jesus’s and the narrator’s silence in 11:1–11 problematic for reasons I discuss in the next section, and I am not convinced that Jesus’s silence or the crowd’s attempts to silence here signify rejection of the term. Instead, Jesus’s initial silence highlights the crowd’s (unjustified) resistance to the man and allows for the man’s persistence. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 509–10; Collins also suggests that the rebuke to silence invites comparison with Peter’s

does have mercy on Bartimaeus by granting his request “that I might see again” (10:51), noting that Bartimaeus’s faith has healed him.³²

Mark 10:1 portrays teaching to be a regular role for Jesus, who teaches the crowds that surround him, “as he had become accustomed to doing.”³³ In this scene, a group of Pharisees arrives to test (πειράζοντες) Jesus, just as Pharisees had in 8:11. They ask him whether “it is permitted for a man to divorce [his] wife” (10:2). Jesus prompts the Pharisees to recount the Torah commandment about divorce (cf. Deut 24:1–4) but immediately retorts that Moses only allowed divorce because of “*your* hardness of heart” (10:5; emphasis added). He then appeals to the creation account as a higher command not to separate (10:6–9).³⁴ Rather than falling into a trap the Pharisees set for him, Jesus

true messianic proclamation and that Bartimaeus’s double proclamation emphasizes the idea ahead of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem. The argument (by Boring and adopted by Malbon) about the use of Rabbi in Mark gives pause, though I would note the term “teacher” is used in different ways by different characters in Mark, thus allowing for Rabbouni, which is close to but still distinct from Rabbi, to have a different connotation than Rabbi (further, there is no indication that Rabbi reflects failure in 11:21). Perhaps the fact that Bartimaeus is blind and beside the way when he calls Jesus “son of David” is meant to signify that he does not yet have full insight, though I address his blindness in the next note. Perhaps the failure of the narrator or Jesus to adopt this title suggests it is not quite right for Jesus. If so, I am not sure that becomes clear until 12:35–37, however, and at that point the Gospel seems to suggest that son of David is too small an accolade. At this point in the narrative, it makes more sense to understand son of David (and Rabbouni) positively and certainly as building Jesus’s public honor. Thus, I am inclined to agree with Collins’s positive assessment of son of David and with Tolbert, who finds the appellation “a clear foreshadowing of the major theme of the second division” (*Sowing the Gospel*, 118).

³² Unlike James and John, who in the previous scene respond to Jesus’s status (and to Jesus’s question, “What do you want me to do for you?” in 10:36) by asking to be seated in positions of power next to him, Bartimaeus responds to Jesus’s status (and the same question; 10:51) with insight about its true purpose: healing and restoration. Bartimaeus asks Jesus to restore his sight, and upon being healed, he follows Jesus, a paradigmatic act of discipleship in Mark. So consult Watson, *Honor among Christians*, 82. Cf. also Abraham Smith “Tyranny Exposed: The Characterization of Herod Antipas in Mark 6:14–29,” *BibInt* 14 (2006): 259–93, esp. 284–85. It is because of this insight, which Bartimaeus displays while still physically blind, that I ultimately do not agree with Malbon that “restoration of sight” is the positive image in sight scenes, whereas blindness is always negative (*Mark’s Jesus*, 88). As such, Collins’s association of Bartimaeus with blind seers in Greek myths is noteworthy (*Mark*, 510).

³³ In addition to teaching crowds, Jesus also teaches his disciples, sometimes privately, in several scenes (8:31–9:1; 9:30–32, 33–37, 42–50; 10:32–34, 35–45; 13:2–37). In 8:27–14:31, Jesus is referred to as “teacher” in 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14. By contrast, in Mark 1:1–8:26, he is only referred to as “teacher” twice (4:38; 5:35), and in the passion narrative, he is never referred to as such.

³⁴ The Damascus Document of Qumran similarly criticizes remarriage after divorce by appealing to Gen 1:27 (CD 4:21). This is now the second time that Jesus has appealed to a creation account to dispute his opponents’ interpretation of Torah (cf. Mark 2:27).

uses scripture to criticize them as being hardhearted; once again, he also positions himself as authoritative interpreter of the scriptures.

Although Mark 9:38–41 and 10:17–22 do not seem to take place in the presence of crowds, these scenes attest to the strength of Jesus’s public reputation. In 9:38–41 Jesus and his disciples discuss a man who has been exorcising demons in Jesus’s name, suggesting that Jesus’s public reputation is strong enough for someone to desire to do this.³⁵ In 10:17–22, Jesus’s reputation as an authoritative teacher precedes him.³⁶ A wealthy man comes to Jesus, calls him “good teacher” and then “teacher” (10:17, 20), and asks him, “What should I do so that I might inherit eternal life?” (10:17). Jesus tells the man that, in addition to keeping “the commandments,” he should sell his possessions and give the money to the poor, then “come follow me;” if he does, he “will have treasure in heaven” (10:21). The man goes away sad, perhaps not wanting to adopt such an ascetic lifestyle. Nevertheless, the man considers Jesus to be an authority on eternal life, and he seems to accept the importance of following Jesus for being part of the kingdom of God.

In attesting to Jesus’s public reputation in semi-private situations, these two scenes also continue to build Jesus’s honor on the discourse level. For instance, in 10:17–22 Jesus resists being called “good”—which he associates with the divine—and thus demonstrates the same modesty that he embodied frequently in Mark 1–8. Despite Jesus’s modesty, however, the passage actually draws close associations between Jesus and God. It is, after all, Jesus who identifies the commandments most pertinent to this man, who calls him to further action, who is the arbiter of what it takes to gain “eternal life” and “treasure in heaven,” and who calls the man to follow after him. While he

³⁵ Such would not be worthwhile if Jesus were not successful or widely respected. The disciples try to stop the man from exorcizing demons in Jesus’s name, but Jesus tells them not to, “For there is no one who will do a mighty deed in my name and who will soon be able to speak evil of me. For whoever is not against us is for us” (9:39–40). Note that Jesus is not threatened by anyone who borrows his name to do good deeds, in part because he believes such a person will not be able to defame him. Thus far, Jesus behaves differently among those who do try to defame him.

³⁶ The scene actually continues through 10:31, but 10:23–31 features an interaction between Jesus and his disciples.

initially seems to resist close association between himself and God, Jesus's subsequent statements suggest that he is at least God's authoritative agent who surely *is* actually good.³⁷ This scene signals yet again to the narrative audience that Jesus is not honor-loving *even though* he houses the divine and shares in the divine identity in some way.

A Ruler's Coronation: Jesus's Triumphal Entry

In Mark 11:1–11, Jesus, who has been traveling toward Jerusalem, nears the city and arranges to have his disciples bring him a foal (πῶλος) upon which to ride as he enters (11:2). As he rides the foal and proceeds toward the Jerusalem temple, “many” (πολλοί) spread out their cloaks in his path while others lay down leafy branches for him (11:8). “Those preceding and those following” proclaim, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our forefather David. Hosanna in the highest!” (11:9–10). Once again, a crowd's enthusiasm for Jesus bolsters his public image. In fact, the crowd's praise and Jesus's actions together echo certain features of a Roman triumph, with Jesus as triumphator.

The Roman triumph was a military procession and honor that celebrated a general's military victories. While its starting point and route varied, it entailed entry into the city of Rome and

³⁷ When the wealthy man initially addresses Jesus as “good teacher,” Jesus responds, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God” (10:18). Whereas 2:1–12 establishes a connection between Jesus and God in part by invoking “one God” language, the same language initially seems to do the opposite here. Scholars are divided on how best to interpret this passage vis-à-vis Jesus's relationship to God, with some arguing that it creates a clear distinction between the two, while others are unconvinced. For instance, scholars who find a distinction being made include Collins, *Mark*, 477; Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 52n77; M. Eugene Boring, “Markan Christology: God-Language for Jesus?” *NTS* 45 (1999): 451–71, esp. 456–57. Scholars who read this passage to support the notion that Jesus shares in God's goodness include Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 544; Joel Marcus, “Authority to Forgive Sins upon the Earth: The *Shema* in the Gospel of Mark,” in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner, *SSEJC* 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 197–211, esp. 208–10; and Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus' Divinity*, 62–63.

Scholars on both sides of this divide recognize that Jesus's response exhibits modesty. Thus, Collins asserts, “The Markan Jesus shows his modesty and piety by not claiming for himself qualities or prerogatives that belong to God alone. This portrayal of him contrasts with the accusations of the scribes and the high priest and council elsewhere in Mark” (*Mark*, 477). Collins finds a clear contrast between Jesus's behavior and of what others accuse him, and she connects that contrast to the notion that Jesus and God are distinct. My own argument is drawn largely upon Pascut, *Redescribing Jesus' Divinity*, 61–63. Pascut's point is to argue that “Jesus shares with God this one-of-its-kind goodness,” that is, “divine goodness,” in support of his claim that Jesus shares in God's divine identity.

procession toward the Capitoline Hill.³⁸ Mary Beard explains, “To be awarded a triumph was the most outstanding honor a Roman general could hope for. He would be drawn in a chariot—accompanied by the booty he had won, the prisoners he had taken captive, and his no doubt rowdy and raucous troops in their battle gear—through the streets of the city to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline hill, where he would offer a sacrifice to the god. The ceremony became a by-word for extravagant display.”³⁹ While the details of actual triumphs varied, this was the common depiction and stereotyped form of the triumph. At its core, the triumph was a celebration of victory, a statement about the honor of Rome, and both a statement about and an elevation of the honor of the one who brought victory to Rome.⁴⁰ Although not the case in the earlier republic, by the time of the civil wars, the monarchical implications and honors of a triumph focused on the individual triumphing, further heightening his honor.⁴¹ The triumphator’s honor was reinforced by the role of spectators. For instance, Pliny the Younger describes the crowd during Trajan’s triumph:

You towered above us only because of your own splendid physique....Thus neither age, health nor sex held your subjects back from feasting their eyes on this unexpected sight: small children learned who you were, young people pointed you out, old men admired: even the sick disregarded their doctors’ orders and dragged themselves out for a glimpse of you as if this could restore their health....Roofs could be seen sagging under the crowds they bore, not a vacant inch of ground was visible except under a foot poised to step, streets were packed on both sides leaving only a narrow passage for you, on every side the excited populace, cheers and rejoicing everywhere. All felt the same joy at your coming. (*Pan.* 22.2–5 [Radice, LCL])

The procession into a city, the movement toward a temple and the triumphator’s approach of it, the felicitous reference to a kingdom, and the central role of praise from onlookers support a

³⁸ Diane Favro, “The Street Triumphant: The Urban Impact of Roman Triumphal Parades,” in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, ed. Zeynep Çelik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 151–64, esp. 153–57.

³⁹ Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 1.

⁴⁰ Cf. Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 251. The triumph also purified the people and warriors after war, justified military campaigns, and appeased/honored the gods. So consult Favro, “The Street Triumphant,” 154–56.

⁴¹ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 55 n108. Here we find associations between the triumphator and divine status.

connection between Mark 11:1–11 and the Roman triumphal procession. These parallels are significant even if Jesus himself does not create an opulent display and is not accompanied by captives, as would be common in a triumph.⁴² Further, despite his relatively modest display, Jesus does ask for a foal instead of traveling on foot. This is the only time in the Gospel he is depicted traveling on land but not on foot.

The intonations of a triumph in Mark 11:1–11 once again create associations between Jesus and Roman emperors. Beginning with the Roman Principate, the honor of triumph (along with certain other military honors) became reserved for the emperor and his close family members.⁴³ “In practice, triumphs were now dynastic events, seemingly used either to showcase chosen heirs...or to celebrate the beginning of reigns, almost as a coronation ritual.”⁴⁴ This latter significance of the triumph fits well with the scene in Mark 11, in which the crowd both blesses Jesus as the one coming “in the name of the Lord” and celebrates the coming kingdom of David. In short, Jesus is honored as messianic agent who is restoring the kingdom of David, and this is celebrated in a way that draws upon the coronation ceremony of emperors.⁴⁵

⁴² And it would not be realistic for Jesus to offer a sacrifice upon arriving at the temple; nonetheless, as treated below, he does establish his authority in the temple.

⁴³ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 112; Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 69, 296–305. Generals could still receive the lesser honors of triumphal *ornamenta*, but not the full-scale triumph itself. This served to increase the prestige of the emperor and check the prestige of all others. This change was implemented under Augustus. Cf. Maggie L. Popkin, *The Architecture of the Roman Triumph: Monuments, Memory, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 93–94. The *Fasti Triumphales*, inscribed panels on the arch of Augustus, list all triumphators in the history of Rome up to the Augustan period (when the panels were inscribed), with L. Cornelius Balbus, who triumphed in 19 BCE, listed as the final name. Popkin suggests that “this decision might have intentionally signified the end of republican triumphs and the start of a new, imperial age of triumphs.”

⁴⁴ Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 296.

⁴⁵ More generally, the text echoes Greco-Roman entrance processions in which a ruler/conqueror is welcomed into and appropriates a city. It also seems to be echoing Zech 9:9; 14 and thus depicting Jesus as fulfilling the divine warrior prophecy therein. So consult Paul Brooks Duff, “The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark’s Account of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 55–71, esp. 55–67. Consult n61 of this chapter for a longer discussion of Duff’s argument, however. Cf. Matthew Ryan Hauge, “The Creation of Person in Ancient Narrative and the Gospel of Mark,” in Skinner and Hauge, *Character Studies*, 57–77, esp. 73–77. Hauge argues that 11:1–11 echoes the account of Alexander the Great taming the horse Bucephalus to signal that “the son of the king and his kingdom are coming.” Thus, it is also possible to draw a broader comparison with great Greco-Roman rulers.

Markan scholars sometimes challenge the connection between Mark 11:1–11 and Roman triumph⁴⁶—or, perhaps more frequently, debate the rhetorical implications of this triumph-invoking scene. Two aspects of this scholarly conversation are pertinent here. First, some refer to this scene as an anti-triumph because of the deviations between it and the stereotypical Roman triumph and because the scene seems to end anticlimactically, as Jesus is not welcomed at the temple, and there is no mention of sacrifice. Incigneri, for instance, avers, “In an anti-climax, the crowd just melts away when Jesus does not claim kingship of the type that they want.”⁴⁷

While what it means for Jesus to be king surely will defy expectations, the honorific effect of 11:1–11 should not be dismissed out of hand. Jesus’s own display is humble, but the crowd is impressed by him.⁴⁸ Further, the “anticlimactic” ending of Jesus’s triumphal procession is not all that different either from other ancient depictions of triumph or from how most spectators of a triumph would have experienced it. That is, “In the case of the triumph, artists and writers dwelt on the procession as it made its way through the streets; they barely recorded in any form, literary or visual, what happened when it reached its destination.”⁴⁹ For many witnesses, the procession was precisely the climax of the triumph.⁵⁰ Mark’s Gospel, then, features the experience of the procession itself as another example of crowds honoring Jesus. There is no compelling reason to assume that the crowd

⁴⁶ Myers asserts that “triumphal entry” is a misnomer, retorting, “The procession is neither unambiguously ‘triumphal’ nor does it actually enter Jerusalem (until the anticlimactic 11:11). The episode, resembling carefully choreographed street theater, is designed to give intentionally conflicting messianic signals” (*Binding the Strong Man*, 294). Contra Myers, the delayed entry into the city does not outweigh the multiple parallels between this scene and Roman triumphs, including the explicit mention of entering the city and proceeding toward the temple. Further, the parallels need neither to be all-encompassing nor exact in order to be effective.

⁴⁷ Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans*, 168. Cf. Evans, “Mark’s Incipit,” 72: “Jesus’ entry into the city of Jerusalem (Mark 11:1–11) may have impressed the inhabitants of the Roman world as the prelude to a triumph of sorts, but that was as far as it went. Jesus receives no honors and no acclaim.”

⁴⁸ And as Kim notes, “This scene recalls for the reader the image of ‘the king’s triumphal procession into his royal citadel’, even though the image of Jesus’ entry is most humble” (*Mark, Women and Empire*, 66).

⁴⁹ Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 249.

⁵⁰ Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 249.

“melts away” in disappointment, since repeatedly throughout Mark crowds appear and disappear within scenes, and in the very next temple scene Jesus captivates yet another crowd (11:15–19). It is true that, when Jesus initially arrives at the temple, the lack of welcome there and the lack of activity on his part leave something wanting, but even this has the effect of building suspense rather than undermining triumphal notions of the passage.⁵¹ The lack of activity also relates specifically to Jesus’s relationship with temple leadership, suggesting *they* are not awed by him, but this should come as no surprise and only serves to further contrast the Jewish leadership’s response to Jesus with that of the larger populace.

Second, Malbon suggests that the crowd’s praise in 11:10, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our forefather David,” is misdirected and that Jesus responds with a “profound silence” meant to reject this praise and deflect attention from himself to God.⁵² She associates the praise with false knowledge, something she suggests Jesus, the narrator, and God consistently, indirectly reject by ignoring.⁵³ It is puzzling to think, however, that silence would be an effective way to correct false knowledge, especially since elsewhere Jesus commands others to silence about the truth.⁵⁴ Jesus’s own actions in the scene invite the notion that he is a kingly, divine agent: in 11:2–3 he requests a foal upon which to enter the city (creating triumphal implications) and refers to himself as “Lord” (creating messianic implications). Malbon holds that Jesus only uses the term “lord” because he “appears to recognize that his disciples and others would refer to him as ‘the master.’”⁵⁵ Jesus’s use

⁵¹ On the suspense-building effect, consult Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, 244–45.

⁵² Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 148.

⁵³ Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 148; cf. 99–101. Malbon contrasts false knowledge with half knowledge, which she asserts Jesus can and does correct.

⁵⁴ It is also difficult to gage the significance of God’s silence in any given scene, since God only directly interacts with other characters a few times.

⁵⁵ Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 149. Relatedly, she argues that the term should not be capitalized.

of *Lord* in 11:3 hardly seems insignificant in light of 11:9 (“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord”), however. Further, if the term were to be understood merely in the sense of “master,” would not the disciples need to specify by saying, “*our* master”? As Winn aptly states, this scene “presents Jesus as God’s messianic agent and ruler. In no way does Jesus resist being identified as one who will bring about God’s salvation and the kingdom of David. While riding on a donkey might convey humility, this pericope depicts Jesus as a popular and powerful figure, one whose identity should be recognized by the Jewish temple authorities.”⁵⁶ This connection holds even if the kingdom Jesus inaugurates defies typical expectations and even if he is not recognized by the temple authorities.

Authority in the Temple: Disruption, Instruction, and Debate

Beginning with the culmination of Jesus’s triumphal entry in 11:11 and continuing until 13:1, Mark features Jesus in the Jerusalem temple precinct.⁵⁷ The narrative progression builds Jesus’s honor by establishing him as authoritative in and over the temple, the center of cultic practice for first-century Jews. This plays out in several ways: (1) Jesus teaches regularly in the temple precinct; (2) Jesus is arbiter of whether the temple is being run properly and criticizes the current temple leadership; (3) when challenged by temple leadership (and other groups of Jewish leaders), Jesus “wins” the exchanges; and (4) Jesus’s teaching and public debates in the temple captivate crowds. As Jesus’s interactions in the temple unfold, his public reputation grows, and his power and authority remain centerstage; however, his opponents become strongly hostile toward him, though they are inhibited by the overwhelming power of his reputation in this public setting.

⁵⁶ Winn, *Reading Mark’s Christology*, 133. Cf. Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 252. While a “poor show might go down badly,” here there is no indication of anything but admiration from the onlookers.

⁵⁷ He leaves in 11:11, 19 (having returned in 11:15) but is otherwise portrayed as being in the temple.

Although Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphally in 11:1–11, his actions in 11:11 leave the narrative audience (and perhaps some of the narrative’s characters) in anticipation of what is to come. Returning to the temple the next day, Jesus disrupts the temple activity—not the sacrificial acts themselves but the buying and selling, the money-changing, and the carrying of vessels that is occurring in the temple precinct (11:15–16). While teaching a crowd, he invokes scripture—quoting Isa 56:7 (“my house shall be called a house of prayer”) and alluding to Jer 7:11 (“you have made it a den of robbers”)—in a scathing critique of the temple’s current leadership. Regardless of the precise meaning of Jesus’s actions, they constitute a claim that he is authoritative arbiter of whether the temple is being maintained properly.⁵⁸ That he is described as teaching suggests that he understands it to be his prerogative (and perhaps his duty) not just to criticize the leadership but to properly instruct the masses on temple maintenance.

Importantly, Jesus’s authority claims are well received by “the whole crowd” (παῖς ὁ ὅχλος), which is said to be “amazed” (ἐξεπλήσσετο) by his teaching (11:18).⁵⁹ By this point in Mark, ἐκπλήσσω has both positive and negative connotations, but the crowd’s response is clearly positive. While the chief priests and scribes’ want to kill Jesus after hearing his upbraiding teaching, Jesus’s popularity

⁵⁸ I am largely in agreement with Collins’s interpretation that Jesus is concerned with ritual purity and temple holiness (*Mark*, 530). Nevertheless, I recognize that this passage is difficult and that there are challenges to all major positions, as is synthesized helpfully by Brian C. Dennert, “Mark 11:16: A Status Quaestionis,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5 (2010): 1–7. I am not particularly convinced by interpreters such as Moloney, who asserts that “Jesus brings to an end the cultic activity of the Jewish temple” (*Gospel of Mark*, 224), or Boring, who essentially says the same: “he brings an end to the cult center itself” (*Mark*, 322). To be sure, Jesus announces the coming destruction of the temple in 13:1. But if Jesus were to be effectively ending the temple in 11:15–18, why would he simply stop activity for a single day, spend extended time there teaching, and praise the widow’s treasury offering (11:27–12:44; cf. 14:49)? In some ways, Jesus’s emphasis on teaching in the temple transforms the temple into a synagogue of sorts (I am indebted to Serge Frolov on this point), but there is no indication in 11:27–12:44 that Jesus interferes with the temple’s cultic activity during his time there. At any rate, Jesus’s critique of the temple combined with his eventual prophecy about its destruction has similarities with the Qumran sectarians (cf. Temple Scroll; Rule of the Community), who rejected the temple leadership to the point of calling for the demise of the second temple but who wanted to be in control of a new temple rather than calling for an end to the institution itself. Cf. Sanders, *Judaism*, 569–71.

⁵⁹ Against John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, there is no reason to think the crowd is responding to the events in 11:1–11 when the text portrays them as responding to Jesus’s teaching (*The Gospel of Mark*, vol. 2 of SP, ed. Daniel J. Harrington [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002], 329).

inhibits them: “they were searching for how they might destroy him, for they were afraid of him, for the whole crowd was amazed by his teaching” (11:18). Perhaps the chief priests and scribes are threatened by the authority and influence Jesus demonstrates in the temple, which is their domain. It cannot help that Jesus’s critique, targeted at them, shames them.⁶⁰

The events pertaining to the fig tree that frame Jesus’s temple disturbance (11:12–14, 20–25) and follow his triumphal entry reinforce his authority in the temple over against the current temple leadership. They also once again portray Jesus as authoritative over nature, since he has the power to curse a fig tree to barrenness, and since the narrative suggests he, along with any who have faith, has the power to move mountains. On the story level, only Jesus’s disciples are present, but the impact for the narrative audience is heightened by the use of the so-called “Markan sandwich” here. The cursing of the fig tree symbolizes Jesus’s judgment on the temple leadership for not recognizing his authority and messiahship, as the crowd does.⁶¹

After Jesus establishes his authority in Jerusalem and the temple, he maintains a presence there. From 11:27 until 12:44 he is portrayed teaching crowds and debating with groups of Jewish

⁶⁰ And if the chief priests and scribes try to respond immediately, they might further experience shame by losing respect from the crowd.

⁶¹ Collins, *Mark*, 525–26. Cf. Duff, “March of the Divine Warrior,” 67–71. In treating Jesus’s triumphal entry and the subsequent passages with the fig tree and in the temple, Duff argues that Jesus’s procession into Jerusalem “abruptly and comically ends” without an act of appropriation over the city; even the next day, when Jesus returns to the temple, “instead of a symbolic appropriation of the Temple, the reader sees Jesus disqualify the center of Jewish worship.” Duff, drawing upon William R. Telford (*The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, JSNTSS 1 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990]), finds three aspects of the text to support this view: (1) Jesus’s cursing of the fig tree in 11:12–14 echoes other Jewish texts that “connect the fruitfulness of trees (in some cases fig trees) with the state of the Temple”; (2) Jesus’s statement about moving mountains with prayer in 11:23 is a veiled reference to the temple mount; (3) Jesus’s statement about the temple being intended as a house of prayer, coupled with his statements in 11:24–25, and his allusion to Jeremiah actually suggest that the temple will be destroyed, not purified. As such, Mark “gives [Jesus’s] ‘triumphal entry’ an ironic twist” that “subverts...triumphal allusions” in order to condemn the temple and challenge expectations that Jesus will inaugurate the kingdom as a warrior-king. While Duff helpfully draws comparisons between Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem, the divine warrior in Zech 14, and Greco-Roman entrance processions, it seems his argument, and Telford’s, confuses Jesus’s condemnation of the temple’s leadership with a condemnation of the institution itself. Instead, Jesus is critiquing the current temple authorities, establishing his authority, and calling for the temple to fulfill its proper role as a place of prayer for all peoples. The failure of the leadership to accept Jesus’s program eventually leads to Jesus’s prophecy of the temple’s destruction *as a judgment on the leadership rather than a rejection of the institution*. So consult Clinton Wahlen, “The Temple in Mark and Contested Authority,” *BibInt* 15 (2007): 248–67. Wahlen specifically critiques Telford on several points.

leaders in the temple.⁶² In 11:11 and 11:15–18 Jesus received no greeting from the temple authorities or other groups of leaders in Jerusalem. When Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the third time in 11:27, he is met by chief priests, scribes, and elders; however, they are there to challenge his authority. Indeed, almost all Jesus’s encounters with Jewish leaders in this section are antagonistic. They challenge Jesus’s authority, and he challenges their (abuse of) authority, and while the leaders’ challenges are meant to undermine Jesus, they have the opposite effect on both the story and the discourse levels.

Thus, in 11:27–31, certain chief priests, scribes, and elders question Jesus: “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority that you do these things?” (11:28). “These things” could refer to some unnarrated activity by Jesus; to Jesus’s “walking around in the temple,” likely teaching; to Jesus’s actions in 11:15–18; to his triumphal entry; or to any combination of such actions.⁶³ Whatever the referent, Jesus’s actions challenge the authority of these leaders and prompt them to challenge *Jesus’s* authority by calling him to account for it—and he does. First, he traps them with a question of his own: “Was the baptism that was of John from heaven or from humans?” (11:30). Whichever answer they choose, Jesus’s opponents will lose face for rejecting John, whether they admit having wrongly rejected him in the past or they upset the crowd by rejecting him now. They opt instead to equivocate, and thus they seem incapable of discerning the things of God: “We do not know,” they reply (11:33).⁶⁴ Second, Jesus demonstrates that he owes

⁶² Although the narrative does not specify how much time lapses from 11:27 to 13:2, it is reasonable to assume that these events take place over an extended period of time (days, weeks, or perhaps longer). Such is supported by Jesus’s statement in 14:49 that he was in the temple teaching “day after day.” As such, Jesus’s “walking around in the temple” (ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ περιπατοῦντος) in 11:27 should be read as a reference to his regular teaching activity in the temple. Cf. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 453–54.

⁶³ Decker, *Mark 9-16*, 100, holds that “these things” (ταῦτα) is a reference to 11:15–17; Collins, *Mark*, 539, believes this may also refer to Jesus’s entry into the city. Interestingly, the scribes from Jerusalem are mentioned in 3:22 and 7:1. In 3:22 they accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the authority of Beelzebul.

⁶⁴ Since they are motivated by not losing face with the crowd, they become people of no conviction. Contrast this with Jesus, who stands by his convictions and has no concern for popularity.

such an uncommanding group no explanation for his actions. To the narrative audience, who is aware of the divine authority vested in Jesus at his baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7), it is clear that the leaders' discernment is impaired with regard to both John and Jesus. Although the narrative characters do not have this knowledge, the crowd's approval of Jesus is implied in 11:32 and 12:12.

Jesus may refuse to answer to the chief priests, scribes, and elders regarding his authority, but he nevertheless makes the source of his authority clear. In 12:1–12 he tells a parable—featuring a vineyard owner and his vineyard, wicked tenants, and abused emissaries and heir—that implicates the leaders God has entrusted with guiding Israel. Through the parable Jesus suggests that the current leadership (so, the chief priests, scribes, and elders) are temporary, unworthy tenants who produce no fruit and reject, even sometimes kill, God's agents.⁶⁵ In contrast, he implies that he is the rightful heir of the vineyard, the rightful authority for the people because he is God's "beloved son" (υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν, 12:6). While the narrative audience has known that Jesus is son of God for some time, this is the first time it is insinuated publicly on the story level. In addition to having imperial implications, the language of divine sonship is suggestive of 2 Sam 7:14 and indicates to Jesus's listeners that he is a Davidic kingly figure who has come to claim rightful authority over the people, rejecting the authority of the current leadership.⁶⁶

According to Mark 12:12, the chief priests, scribes, and elders realize that Jesus has defamed them; they surely also recognize his claims to authority. They make no retort, however, leaving Jesus the last word. In fact, they show their lack of conviction or command, since they *want* to arrest Jesus but do not because "they feared the crowd" (12:12). Instead, they simply leave.

⁶⁵ Cf. 6:21–29. It is surely no accident that Jesus has just mentioned John the Baptist.

⁶⁶ On the Davidic implications of the "son" language: Serge Frolov, "Reclaiming the Vineyard: The 'Rebellious Tenants' Story as a Political Allegory," in *The Impartial God: Essays in Biblical Studies in Honor of Jouette M. Bassler*, ed. Calvin J. Roetzel and Robert L. Foster (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 23–35; Collins, "Son of God among Jews," 402. Collins states, "The beloved son clearly has a status higher and greater than that of the prophets. The trope in which the vineyard is the 'house of Israel' suggests that Jesus, like Solomon, the son of David, beloved by God, is a king of the line of David, whose patrimony is the house of Israel."

The three subsequent scenes (12:13–17, 18–27, 28–34) also feature interactions that challenge Jesus. In keeping with the narrative momentum, Jesus continues to defend his authority and honor. As presented in Table 4, the first two interactions are antagonistic; while the third is not, it still functions as a challenge scene. The cumulative effect of these three scenes is to demonstrate that, whether a challenge is benign, covertly antagonistic, or overt, Jesus impressively demonstrates that he cannot be bested. In fact, he demonstrates his superior authority and wisdom.

Table 4: Honor Challenges in Mark 12:13–34

Passage	Opponent	Topic	Nature of Challenge	Conclusion of Scene
12:13–17	Pharisees and Herodians	Paying taxes to the emperor	Feigned honor with intentions to shame	“And they were extremely astounded (<i>ἐξεθαύμαζον</i>) by him.”
12:18–27	Sadducees	Marriage and the resurrection	Overt challenge	Jesus concludes his retort by saying, “You have gone very far astray.”
12:28–34	A scribe	The greatest commandment	Genuine dialogue and mutual approbation	Jesus assesses, “You are not far from the kingdom of God;” thus, “no one dared to question him any longer.”

In 12:13–17, a group of Pharisees and Herodians—who are sent by the chief priests, scribes, and elders—try to “catch” Jesus “in [his] speech” (12:13) by questioning him about paying taxes.⁶⁷ Though they pretend to honor Jesus, he recognizes their play-acting, and asks, “Why are you testing *[πειράζετε]* me?” (12:15). His ensuing command to “render to Caesar the things of Caesar and to God the things of God” leaves the Pharisees and Herodians astounded (*ἐξεθαύμαζον*) at him (12:17), quite the opposite of what they (and those who sent them) had hoped to accomplish. In 12:18–23, Jesus responds to Sadducees who question him about the resurrection by challenging both the premise of the question and their spiritual insight.⁶⁸ He accuses them of having “gone astray”

⁶⁷ The Greek for “catch him in [his] speech” is *ἀγρεύσωσιν λόγῳ*. *Ἀγρεύω* literally refers to the capture in a hunt. LSJ, “*ἀγρεύω*,” 14. The Markan phrase could also be translated “ensnare him in debate” or “catch him with [their] speech.” From any angle, the Pharisees and Herodians are trying to trip up, humiliate, and discredit Jesus. France refers to their coming as “an official delegation with the aim of discrediting Jesus” (*Gospel of Mark*, 464).

⁶⁸ Although it is not explicitly stated that the Sadducees have antagonistic motives, the context of the passage and Jesus’ negative response to their question suggest this is the case.

because they know “neither the scriptures nor the power of God” (12:24). After appealing to the Torah and thus demonstrating his own knowledge of God and scriptures, Jesus emphatically concludes, “You have gone very far astray” (12:27).

Jesus’s conversation with a scribe in 12:28–34 is not antagonistic, although the exchange does put Jesus to the test. Overhearing Jesus’s dispute with the Sadducees and noticing that he answers the Sadducees’ query “well” (καλῶς), the scribe asks Jesus which commandment is greatest (12:28). When Jesus answers, the scribe responds approvingly (Καλῶς, Διδάσκαλε), as if he is the judge of Jesus’s wisdom. It is, however, Jesus who, assessing this response by the scribe, offers the final approbation: “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (12:34).⁶⁹ As a result of this sequence of scenes, the narrative audience continues to perceive Jesus as authoritative, wise, and adequate to any challenge. It is clear that the narrative’s characters also recognize something of the sort, since “no one dared to question him any longer” (12:34).

Indeed, in Jesus’s remaining time in the temple, he is not challenged again. Instead, he teaches and openly denounces the scribes.⁷⁰ First, in 12:35–37 he teaches about the messiah by way of criticizing the scribes, and the “great crowd” listens “with pleasure” (12:37). Taking up the idea that the messiah is the “son of David,” Jesus challenges not the association with David but the notion that the messiah’s status is derived from David, as David’s “son.” The messiah, though kingly and of David, derives his status and identity from God.⁷¹ Second, in 12:38–40 Jesus castigates the

⁶⁹ This positive interaction between Jesus and the scribe builds Jesus’s honor and shows him to be more authoritative than the scribe; at the same time, it is a positive-sum exchange, in which Jesus also honors the scribe. As such, the Gospel complexifies the categories of follower and foe. Cf. Malbon, “Jewish Leaders,” esp. 275–76.

⁷⁰ France suggests that these scenes reaffirm the division between Jesus and the scribes, which might be in question for the narrative audience after 12:28–34, and communicate that “in the contest which has been taking place since 11:27 it is Jesus who is now emerging as the clear winner” (*Gospel of Mark*, 476, 485).

⁷¹ And by quoting Ps 110:1, Jesus may be invoking the idea that the messiah is ruler (Ps 110:2) and “evermore a priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (110:4). Tolbert understands this passage to suggest that Jesus’s authority is far greater than a king’s: “Jesus’ rights, authority, and power far exceed those of a king, even King David, because they are bestowed by reason of his divine sonship, not his Jewish ancestry. Thus, Son of David is only one aspect of Jesus’

scribes for seeking honor without being truly honorable. According to Jesus, they dress the part of the prestigious, expect public recognition, and want the “best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets” (12:39). Despite their desire for public status and recognition, the scribes have no virtue; their treatment of the needy (here, widows) is greedy, and their piety is only a show.⁷²

These two scenes further promote Jesus’s authority, wisdom, and status and undermine the authority of Jesus’s opponents, here the scribes. Jesus’s honor is affirmed by the crowd—it is he to whom they listen, and they delight in his teaching (12:37). Jesus, in turn, honors a poor widow who gives to the temple treasury. Unlike the scribes, who take advantage of people like her, this woman is generous and faithful, giving “her whole livelihood” (12:44). This last word from Jesus before he leaves the temple reiterates that he views the temple institution positively but is asserting his own authority—over against that of existing leadership—within the institution.⁷³

In 13:1–2, then, when Jesus prophesies the fall of the temple to his disciples as they depart from it together, he is not rejecting the validity of the institution but emphatically rejecting the authority of its present leadership. Like the prophets of the scriptures, Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple as a judgment against the leadership of the people. Thus, Jesus provides a fitting end to the public challenges he has faced in the temple. France observes that throughout the ongoing

wider role as heir of the vineyard.” But Jesus can be a king *and* be more than a king. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 581–82. Collins holds that Jesus “is son of David, but not in the way that many in his time would expect. His identity is best expressed in terms of the juxtaposition of and tension between the suffering Son of Man and the glorious Son of Man related to the vision of a heavenly one like a son of man in Dan 7:13.” Cf. also Evans, *Mark* 8:27–16:20, 262.

⁷² In contrast to the scribes, who love honor and claim to have authority, Jesus has the true authority. Nonetheless, how Jesus chooses to assert his authority will look drastically different from that of the scribes. As messiah, his interest is not primarily in having prestige, but in being faithful to his messianic task. Regarding Jesus’s critique of the scribes, cf. Epictetus, *Ench.* 15. Epictetus encourages people not to seek special honors at banquets but to accept one’s food in turn, thus becoming worthy to share a banquet with the gods. Regarding those who seek honors, one is reminded of *Satyricon*’s Trimalchio, who incessantly tries to display his so-called honor at his own banquet.

⁷³ Several scholars express concern that Jesus’s commendation of the widow in 12:41–44 supports an oppressive imperial establishment. While space does not permit an in-depth treatment of the issue, Tat Siong Benny Liew provides a helpful review of scholarship (“Postcolonial Criticism: Echoes of a Subaltern’s Contribution and Exclusion,” in Anderson and Moore, *Mark and Method*, 211–31, esp. 224–230). But Cf. Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus*, 66–77 as well as n80 in this chapter.

match between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, Jesus has become increasingly proactive, moving from the defensive to the offensive. Mark 13:1–2 serves as the apotheosis of the interactions thus far, and the result is that “Jesus, now the unquestioned winner in the contest, himself sever[s] the connection [with the authorities] by leaving the temple and pronouncing its downfall.”⁷⁴

Anticipation of Things to Come

Interspersed within the continued trajectory that traces the momentum of Jesus’s honor in 8:27–14:31 are portents of another trajectory that is yet to unfold for Jesus. In this section of the Gospel, Jesus also repeatedly speaks about the disrespect, abandonment, abuse, and violent death that await him; the eventual vindication he will experience through his resurrection; and the ultimate power he will have as the returning Son of Humanity. Additionally, the narrative moves toward the realization of these circumstances through the developing destructive plans of Jesus’s opponents and Jesus’s own preparations for his death. On Mark’s story level, these prophetic statements and premonitory events are most often witnessed only by disciples, though occasionally other characters are present. In addition to preparing the disciples for what is to come, such scenes importantly create suspense for the narrative audience.

Passion Prophecies

Jesus’s first prophetic statement comes right after Peter has proclaimed him messiah on their way to Caesarea Philippi. This passage, Mark 8:27–9:1 (or 8:27–33), is considered a major turning point in the Gospel precisely because it is at this point that Jesus begins speaking about his coming crucifixion. Peter makes the messianic declaration about Jesus in response to Jesus’s question, “Who do you say I am?” Although Jesus has previously sought concealment regarding his deeds among

⁷⁴ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 494. France is correct in noting Jesus’s move from defensive to offensive throughout Mark 12, but Jesus’s actions in the temple recorded in chapter 11 are certainly also offensive.

humans and has commanded unclean spirits to silence about his identity, this is the first time in the Gospel that Jesus commands humans to be silent about his identity: “And he rebuked [ἐπετίμησεν] them so that they would tell no one about him” (8:30). It is also the first time Jesus speaks about the suffering, death, and resurrection that await him: “And he began to teach them that the Son of Humanity must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and after three days rise” (8:31).

Although he mentions his looming suffering, death, *and* resurrection, Jesus wishes to lay emphasis on the trials that await him. When Peter attempts to rebuke Jesus (ἐπιτιμᾶν), Jesus reiterates his coming suffering by rebuking (ἐπετίμησεν) Peter as his adversary, saying to him in front of the disciples, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not thinking of the things of God but of the things of humans” (8:33). That is, Peter is worried about Jesus’s (and perhaps his own) reputation and does not want Jesus to experience public shame. Jesus, on the other hand, is committed to his mission in the face of shame.

In this same passage, while teaching the disciples and a crowd about the related costs of discipleship, Jesus also prophesies about the future culmination of the kingdom of God, which will come “with power” before “some among those standing here taste death” (9:1). At this time, Jesus (the Son of Humanity) “will come in the glory of the Father, with his holy angels” (8:38). Jesus places this glorious prophecy within the context of his coming suffering, since he warns that he will be ashamed of whoever in the present generation “might be ashamed of me” (8:38); however, the larger crowd may not fully understand this contextualization, since Jesus is said to prophesy his suffering and death only to his disciples. Regardless, the future culmination of the kingdom and

Jesus's role in it will resolve beyond the scope of Mark's narrative, making these particular prophecies external prolepses.⁷⁵

Jesus prophesies about some combination of his suffering and death, resurrection, and future glory in several other passages in Mark 8–14. As shown in Table 5, he prophesies about his shameful rejection, suffering, and death six times from 8:27 to 14:31. Beyond the scenes included in Table 5, Jesus also mentions his death in 14:8, though without focusing specifically on his suffering and shame. In four of Jesus's passion prophecies, he also mentions his resurrection. Additionally, four times (three of which are paired with passion prophecies), Jesus prophesies about events that will take place beyond the scope of Mark's narrative: Jesus meeting his disciples in Galilee, the coming kingdom and Jesus's glorious coming, the gathering of the elect, and God's reckoning for the current religious leaders.

In all but one case, the prophesied vindication, while an important part of the prophecies, is less in focus than Jesus's suffering and shame. In the one exception (Jesus's statement about the Son of Humanity in 13:26–27) the focus of the larger passage is not on Jesus's suffering and shame, but neither is it on the glorious Son of Humanity. Instead, the focus is actually on turmoil and persecution awaiting Jesus's followers.

The focus on Jesus's suffering and shame can be observed, for instance, in 9:9–13. Immediately following his transfiguration, Jesus answers a query by Peter, James, and John about Elijah preceding the Son of Humanity. Jesus tells them that, just as the predecessor to the Son of Humanity—Elijah, or John the Baptist—suffered and was killed at the hands of the current leadership, so too will the Son of Humanity “suffer many things and be brought to nothing” (9:12).

⁷⁵ On the one hand, the narrative audience does not yet know that these prophecies are not resolved in the narrative; on the other hand, the audience surely assumes this to be the case since they have outside knowledge that Jesus has not returned as Son of Humanity. Ultimately, though, the audience need not be able to identify an external prolepsis as such.

Table 5: Jesus's Prophecies of His Shame and Vindication in Mark 8:27–14:31

Passage	Prophesied Suffering/Shame	Prophesied Vindication (Including <i>External Prolepses</i>)*
8:27–9:1	And he began to teach them that the Son of Humanity must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed...	...and after three days rise. <i>“Whoever is ashamed of me..., of that person the Son of Humanity will also be ashamed whenever he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.... There are some who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God having come with power.”</i>
9:9–13	The Son of Humanity will “suffer many things and be brought to nothing”	He ordered them that they should relate what they had seen to no one until after the Son of Humanity had risen from the dead.
9:30–32	“When the Son of Humanity is handed over into human hands, they will also kill him;...”	“...and, having been killed, he will rise after three days.”
10:32–45	“The Son of Humanity will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, and they will mock him and spit upon him and whip him and kill him....” “For the Son of Humanity came...to give his life as a ransom for many”	“...And after three days he will rise.”
12:1–12	“So they seized him, killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.”	<i>The vineyard owner “will come and destroy the farmers and will give the vineyard to others.”</i>
13:3–37		<i>“They will see the Son of Humanity coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send the angels, and he will gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven.”</i>
14:17–31	“One of you who is eating with me will betray me.... You will all be caused to stumble away.... Now, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you [Peter] will deny me three times.”	<i>“No longer will I drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.... But after I am raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”</i>
*In column three, external prolepses are italicized to differentiate them from prophecies of vindication that will be fulfilled within the narrative.		

In 10:33–34, Jesus tells his twelve disciples that he, the Son of Humanity, “will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death” before handing him over to the Romans, who “will mock him and spit upon him and whip him and kill him.” Here, Jesus details not only the betrayal and violence but also the public humiliation he will undergo.

As previously suggested, Jesus’s prophetic statements create suspense in the Gospel narrative. This occurs most importantly on the discourse level, since Jesus’s disciples fail to

understand his prophecies, to which they alone are often privy.⁷⁶ In 9:9–13, Peter, James, and John do not understand what Jesus is talking about when he asks them not to tell anyone about his transfiguration until after his resurrection (9:9). Later, the larger group of disciples does not understand what Jesus is talking about when he prophesies his death and resurrection (9:32). It is also clear that James and John do not fully understand the significance of Jesus’s passion predictions even after he has made several, since they ask to be seated to his right and to his left in his “glory” (10:37). To this Jesus responds, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism by which I am baptized?” (10:38) When they assert that they are able to do this, Jesus states, “You will drink the cup I drink; and with the baptism by which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give, but [it is] for those for whom it has been prepared.” (10:39–40)⁷⁷

For the narrative audience, however, which has already been warned of the antagonism of Jesus’s opponents toward Jesus (3:6) and of Judas’s betrayal of him (3:19), these prophetic statements communicate clearly that the narrative tide is about to change drastically from its established momentum. The various prophecies of suffering and vindication collectively preview a majority of the events that will occur in the final chapters of the narrative and thus collectively serve as a *mise-en-abyme* for the remaining action of the narrative. They promise resolution in and beyond

⁷⁶ Only in one scene does Jesus speak more openly about what is in store for him: when he tells the parable of the vineyard management to the scribes, chief priests, and elders in the presence of a crowd (12:1–12). This parable functions as a claim to authority by Jesus, the “beloved” son, as I discussed previously. Nonetheless, it also functions prophetically to suggest that Jesus’s authority will not be accepted by the “tenants,” that is, the current Jewish leadership. The vineyard owner (God) hopes that the tenants will “feel regard [ἐντραπήσονται] for my son,” with ἐντρέπω indicating a recognition of one’s own limitations (thus, a tending of boundaries, or shame). Cf. LSJ, “ἐντρέπω,” 577. Instead, the tenants have no such regard for the son’s important status. In fact, *recognizing* the son’s significance, they actively *do not* respect him. They plot to and then eliminate him, hoping to retain permanent control over what was rightfully the son’s.

⁷⁷ Similarly, in *Ephesian Tale*, after receiving the oracle, Anthia and Habrocomes’s fathers “were at once at a loss and had no idea at all what the danger was, and they could not understand the god’s utterance. They did not know what he meant by their illness, the flight, the chains, the tomb, the river, or the help from the goddess” (1.7 [Anderson]).

the narrative, but they also promise that what comes before the resolution will be difficult, painful and debasing for Jesus, creating suspense for the narrative audience.

Such suspense is further heightened in scenes such as 12:1–12, 14:3–9, and 14:17–31, which help move the plot forward while anticipating the events foretold.⁷⁸ In 12:1–12, when Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard, emphasizing his role as “beloved son” and the temple leadership’s role as evil and reckless tenants, the chief priests, scribes, and elders want to arrest him in response.⁷⁹ The crowd is all that stops them, and, while the fear of the crowd *does* stop them, their reaction suggests they are otherwise closer to action than Jesus’s opponents in 3:6, where a plot to destroy Jesus forms, but there is no indication when or how the plot will be realized.

Although Jesus only mentions his death vaguely in 14:3–9, this scene progresses the plot even further toward the realization of Jesus’s prophecies. Importantly, it is sandwiched between 14:1–2 and 14:10–11. In 14:1–2, once again the narrative audience encounters the chief priests and scribes, who are “searching for how, after cunningly arresting him, they might kill” Jesus (14:1). Once again, their only hesitation is the crowd; they wish to avoid causing tumult among “the people” during the Passover holidays (14:2). In verse 3, the setting shifts to the home of a man named Simon, where Jesus is with some unspecified group. When a woman honors Jesus by anointing his head with expensive oil, some people become “vexed among themselves” and question

⁷⁸ Again, we find a similar literary device (foreshadowing that progresses the plot) in *Ephesian Tale*. Though Anthia and Habrocomes’s fathers do not understand the oracle, “They decided after a great deal of deliberation to palliate the oracle as far as they could and marry the pair, since the god implied by his prophecy that this was his will too. They decided this and determined to send them on a trip abroad for a time after their marriage” (1.7 [Anderson]). Then, “After a little while their fathers decided to carry out their decision and send them away from the city; they were to see some other land and other cities, and palliate the effect of the divine oracle as far as they could by leaving Ephesus for a while” (1.10 [Anderson]).

⁷⁹ Frolov, “Reclaiming the Vineyard,” 34, suggests that their response is motivated by the following: if Jesus is the rightful heir, in order for them to be spared and not destroyed by the owner, they will need to “pay rent,” or offer the fruit which has so far been lacking and which Jesus exemplifies how to offer (through his scriptural interpretations and practices). To do this means not only buying into Jesus’s teachings, which they are not prepared to do, but also potentially creating trouble with the Romans, since the associations between Jesus and David could signal political rebellion. The leaders are unlikely to risk angering the Romans if they are already unwilling to accept Jesus’s teachings and their own delegitimization. Thus, they decide that “this Jesus must be arrested, and the sooner the better.”

the woman's use of the oil, since it could have been sold and the money from the sale used for the poor (14:4–5). Jesus resists these complaints and retorts, “Let her be. Why are you giving her trouble? She did a good deed for me” (14:6).⁸⁰ He continues, insisting that the woman has come “ahead of time to anoint my body for burial” (14:8). No further response is offered by the critics; however, immediately following Jesus's retort, “Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, departed to the chief priests in order to betray him to them” (14:10). The chief priests are “delighted” and promise to pay him; Judas begins “seeking for a way to hand him over opportunely” (14:11). The Gospel does not state what prompts Judas to betray Jesus, but one possible explanation is that Judas is unwilling to associate with a leader who is imminently headed to his death—especially a death as shameful as Jesus has been warning his disciples it will be.⁸¹ With this series of scenes, the plan to destroy Jesus is taking shape, though it is still not quite materializing.

⁸⁰ Yet again, we encounter a woman who honors Jesus and whom Jesus honors, rather than an antagonistic relationship like those Jesus has with several male characters in the Gospel. Cf. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark,” *Semeia* 28 (1983): 29–48, esp. 39–40; Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire*, 110–113. Kim asserts that this woman breaks into a hostile environment to coronate a new king as an act of defiance against Rome's empire. Jesus associates her act with his death and signals that “his kingship against imperialism is actualized through his death on the cross” (112). I might suggest instead that Jesus's kingship entails his death but is not only and finally actualized through it.

While I do not wish to diminish the woman's role in this scene, I think the group's critique of the woman is also a critique of Jesus for accepting the gift and perhaps even suggesting he is not worthy of it, an atypical response from an unspecified group thus far in Mark. On the propriety of Jesus accepting such an expensive gift, cf. Liew, “Postcolonial Criticism,” 198. Liew suggests that Jesus, who previously critiqued the scribes for allowing a poor widow to give her entire livelihood, holds a double standard here. But one wonders if this misses the point of the episode in 14:3–9, where the woman is not said to give all she has. She gives a very costly gift to Jesus to show his worth, yes, but this does not come at the expense of the poor, since Jesus has repeatedly *created* wholeness and abundance throughout the Gospel. Further, Jesus *interprets* the action in light of his coming death rather than demanding his own greatness. On the topic of postcolonial interpretations, Stephen D. Moore provides a thought-provoking critique of Jesus, who fails to apply the lesson of the “absolute gift” of “expenditure without reserve” and thus renege on his violent eschatological reckoning (“Mark and Empire: ‘Zealot’ and ‘Postcolonial’ Readings,” *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera [St. Louis: Chalice, 2004], 134–48, esp. 148).

⁸¹ It seems unlikely that Judas would abandon and betray Jesus because he disagrees with Jesus's stance about the poor since Jesus has repeatedly helped the disenfranchised and needy. It also seems unlikely that Judas would balk at messianic implications of the anointing, since there is no indication that he took issue with Jesus being proclaimed messiah (8:29) or welcomed as a ruler into Jerusalem (11:1–11). On the other hand, Judas could feasibly take issue with Jesus once again shirking an opportunity for significant prestige (the anointing) by bringing the focus to his nearing death. This interpretation would make sense in light of the multiple instances of the disciples seeking their own or Jesus's prestige.

During and after the Passover meal he has with his disciples (14:17–31), Jesus’s anticipation of his coming trials intensifies and communicates to the disciples and the narrative audience that his suffering is about to commence.⁸² He describes his looming death symbolically using the wine and the bread consumed at the meal, stating that his blood is “poured out for many.”⁸³ He makes clear, however, that his death will come about in part because he is betrayed by one of his own followers. He also asserts that the remainder of his followers will “be caused to stumble away” (14:27). Jesus references his resurrection once more and indicates that he will meet his disciples in Galilee; the disciples respond not to Jesus’s resurrection or their future reconciliation, but to the claim that they will desert Jesus. Peter claims that, even if he is the only one, he will not desert Jesus, but Jesus responds by insisting that Peter will, in fact, deny Jesus three times that very night before the rooster’s second crow. Peter and the other disciples remain incredulous, pledging to be faithful to Jesus to the point of death. Nevertheless, Jesus’s prophecy is in line with what he has been saying for some time, and thus the narrative effect is to emphasize what Jesus says.

Suspense and the Prophesied Vindication of Jesus and his Followers

In frequent connection with his predictions of suffering, in Mark 8–14 Jesus also teaches his disciples about values he wants them to embody and the suffering they too can expect. Jesus teaches that any who follow him must “deny oneself,” “take up one’s cross,” “let go of one’s soul” (8:34–35), and expect persecutions (10:29–30; 13:9–13). He tells James and John, “You will drink the cup I drink; and with the baptism by which I am baptized, you will be baptized” (10:39), and later it becomes clear that the cup Jesus drinks is the spilling of his blood at his death (14:24).⁸⁴ Jesus also

⁸² The scene is set with Jesus’s prophetic insight, as he gives the disciples instructions about the place where they will celebrate Passover. Not only does Jesus know what will transpire, he also anticipates that the master of the house will offer hospitality to him because of his reputation as teacher. Collins, *Mark*, 647.

⁸³ This statement, along with Jesus’s previous statement that he will die as a “ransom for many” (10:45) suggests a noble purpose for Jesus’s death—he dies in commitment to the kingdom and the wholeness it brings.

teaches his followers that “whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant” (10:43), and elsewhere he encourages them to “be last of all and servant of all” (9:25).

Jesus’s calls to action for and prophetic statements about his followers and potential followers are informed by his personal ethic plus his knowledge of the violent rejection he will experience in his own ministry. These statements are intended in part to foster values among his followers (in the narrative of the Gospel and its audience), who are participants in his powerful ministry, that include care for others, service, and humility.⁸⁵ Part of their purpose is also to prepare followers for the suffering they, like Jesus, can expect because of their association with him. Still another part of their purpose is to offer hope, since Jesus promises his followers that those who let go of their lives for the Gospel will save them (8:35), the last will be first (10:31), those who are cut off from family and undergo persecution will receive a new family and eventually “eternal life” (10:29–30), and the elect will be gathered when the Son of Humanity comes (13:27).

These positive promises are predicated on Jesus’s own vindication, which he also promises his followers; both sets of promises motivate Jesus’s story- and discourse-level followers to follow him, even in the face of shameful persecution. In light of these promises, a question arises: do the promises of vindication Jesus makes about himself and his followers ease the narrative suspense and preemptively mitigate the coming shame he will experience in Mark 14–15? In addressing this question, I turn to St. Clair’s argument.

⁸⁴ The Gospel’s discourse has also already previewed for the narrative audience what can happen to God’s faithful agents by recounting the death of John the Baptist (6:14–29). Susan Watts Henderson asserts that the placement of this account in part stresses that those who embrace God’s rule, by consequence, will encounter personal threat (*Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 172–73).

⁸⁵ Cf. Smith, “Tyranny Exposed,” 259–93. Smith draws connections between 10:42–45, in which Jesus instructs his disciples not to act like tyrants who lord over others but instead to become servants of others, and the beheading of John the Baptist in 6:14–29 to demonstrate the Gospel’s emphasis on follower formation for disciples in the narrative and its audience. Smith demonstrates that Mark typologically characterizes Herod Antipas as a tyrant who lords over others, in contrast to John, Jesus, and hopefully Jesus’s followers.

Focusing on 8:31–38 in light of the values of honor and shame, St. Clair analyzes the relationship between Jesus’s prophesied pain and the pain of his disciples in Mark.⁸⁶ As she argues, Jesus first predicts the attempts of the Jewish leaders to destroy him painfully and publicly, thereby shaming him. Jesus then issues a call to discipleship to any who will follow him (including the narrative audience) and suggests that, just as he will be mistreated, so too can his followers expect to be shamefully mistreated. They will experience shameful treatment to the point that they must be “prepared to die as a consequence of following Jesus,” as St. Clair interprets the phrase “take up one’s cross” in 8:34.⁸⁷ St. Clair argues that this phrase, taken together with the call to “deny oneself”—which she understands as a “command to relinquish one’s primary group orientation and accept Jesus and his followers as one’s new group”⁸⁸—indicates that Jesus is calling for a reversal of honor and shame among his followers:

Jesus has invited them to participate in a ministry that, according to their societal standards, only brings shame. Therefore, the call to follow Jesus is a call to reorient their perspective and affirm Jesus’ honor system. Rather than seeking the honor that the religious rulers and other elite member of society have the power and authority to ascribe, they must seek the only true honor—that which God bestows through Jesus....By enduring the shame of the world for the sake of the gospel, they will acquire honor in the sight of God. Those who succumb to the honor standards of the world and, therefore, forsake the gospel will ultimately lose their lives. In striving for the honor of humans, they will become dishonorable in the eyes of God.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ St. Clair distinguishes between suffering and pain. She defines suffering as “unmetabolized, unscrutinized agony.” Pain, on the other hand, is “named, recognized agony that can be transformed into something else.” She then identifies what Jesus experiences, as well as what his disciples can expect, as pain rather than suffering (*Call and Consequences*, 36). I use the term *suffering* more generally in my own analysis but retain her language in presenting her argument. By suffering I mean mistreatment at the hands of others. I do agree with St. Clair that the Gospel is not promoting the permanent, unreflective endurance of unjust circumstances.

⁸⁷ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 138.

⁸⁸ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 135.

⁸⁹ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 139. Cf. 160: “Jesus insists that to uphold the society’s prevailing notions of honor and shame is to seek honor from those who have none to give. Should this generation choose to reject Jesus based on society’s estimation of his worth, it is employing a false standard.”

In Jesus's honor system, argues St. Clair, God is the court of opinion who ultimately determines the honor status of Jesus and of Jesus's followers.⁹⁰ If they accept this honor system, Jesus's followers will experience honor because Jesus is the broker of God's honor, and Jesus himself, despite being shamed by "this generation," is honored by God. That his ministry is the will of God and that his true honor comes *from God* (rather than the seeming honor he receives from humans during his ministry) are confirmed by Jesus's promised resurrection and glorious return. Although any who follow Jesus will share in his shame, they will also share in his vindication and thus in his honor—as long as they are not ashamed of Jesus and accept that attempts to destroy and shame him are themselves actually shameful.

St. Clair suggests that 8:31–38, along with other passages like it in the central chapters of Mark, motivates people to become followers of Jesus with full awareness not only of Jesus's ministry but also of his shameful crucifixion. "Mark does this by first showing his readers/hearers that the essential point of similarity between Jesus and his disciples is ministry, not pain. Next, he convinces his readers/hearers that only Jesus' honor is unimpeachable. By following Jesus, they, too, share in the honor that comes from God," so honor becomes motivational for following.⁹¹

As I noted previously, St. Clair's presentation of first-century Mediterranean culture and notions of honor is a bit oversimplified. Her language of "the honor standards of the world" is suggestive of a singular and uniform system of honor in the first-century Mediterranean world. By contrasting "the honor of humans" with true honor, which comes from God, she suggests, even if unintentionally, that God offers one kind of honor while humans offer another kind. I think she is more accurate when she speaks of a shifting court of opinion from humans to God (although human recognition of Jesus's honor still remains important during Mark's denouement).

⁹⁰ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 140–42, esp. 42.

⁹¹ St. Clair, *Call and Consequences*, 159.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that only the honor Jesus receives from God contributes meaningfully to his repertoire of honor in the Gospel. To discount the honor he gains among humans in Mark 1–8 almost reduces such honor to his popularity without accounting for *why* Jesus has such popularity: authority, godly power, benefaction, virtue, and modesty. I would submit that, instead, Jesus is presented as honorable in keeping with common notions of honor, including divine approval and divinely granted status.⁹² When Jesus experiences shameful suffering, several aspects of his honor are called into question, but the reasons he is ultimately vindicated are consistent with the reasons he gains honor first in Mark 1–8 and now in Mark 8–14: authority, impressiveness, benefaction, and virtue. All of these can fit within otherwise attested first-century notions of honor.

Despite this drawback of St. Clair's argument, she astutely emphasizes that Jesus's statements about followership, which often accompany his passion predictions, encourage narrative characters and the narrative audience to become followers of or remain faithful to Jesus in the face of Jesus's shame and their own. Rhetorically, this is accomplished in part by foreshadowing vindication for Jesus and his followers. Returning to the question about suspense in the Gospel narrative, however, the combined impact of such foreshadowing does not mitigate the shame Jesus experiences or the suspense present in the narrative discourse. Again, Jesus himself lays emphasis on his suffering and shame in his self-referential prophetic statements, thus drawing attention to the experience of shame more than future vindication at this point. What is more, the narrative suspense is heightened by the disciples' actions (and prophesied actions) as contrasted with Jesus's own warnings and exhortations for them.

I discussed previously that Jesus's disciples fail to comprehend his prophecies of his own suffering, death, and resurrection. It also seems that they fail to truly understand and adopt the

⁹² And on the issue of servant leadership, Jesus also falls in line with cultural sentiments that resist *philotimia* and find service a source of honor.

implications of Jesus's ethical formation of and prophecies about themselves. On one occasion (9:33–34) the disciples argue among themselves about which of them is the greatest. On another (10:35–45), James and John ask to have positions of prominence in Jesus's glory. Even though these brothers tell Jesus they are prepared to accept his "cup" and "baptism" (10:38–39), their conversation with Jesus elicits an argument among the larger group of twelve, prompting Jesus to teach them for the second time about servant leadership. Robert Tannehill suggests that the disciples' resistance to Jesus's message on these matters creates a tension between Jesus and his disciples that, as it develops, forces the narrative audience to choose between the attitude of Jesus or that of his disciples.⁹³ The narrative is building, rather than resolving, suspense.

Along with their failure to accept Jesus's teachings and prophecies about himself and his followers, in Mark 14 the disciples also move toward rejection of Jesus rather than toward the faithfulness for which he calls. First, Jesus's association of his anointing with his death seems to prompt Judas to leave the fold and plot to betray Jesus (14:3–11). Then, during and immediately following his Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus prophesies Judas's betrayal (14:18), the disciples' desertion (14:27), and Peter's denial (14:30), stating explicitly that the desertion and denial will take place that same night. Tannehill avers that the narrative audience "knows how the disciples' story will come out, for Jesus' predictions carry authority. But that does not lessen [their] emotional involvement. The emotions of tragedy are aroused as the reader witnesses the fatal promises being made and recognizes the approach of disaster."⁹⁴ Again, the narrative builds suspense.

⁹³ Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role" *JR* 57 (1977): 386–405, esp. 401–2. This does not mean that Mark intends for the narrative audience to reject the disciples, against Weeden's reading of Mark ("Heresy," 145–58). For another treatment of how the narrative audience relates to Jesus versus the disciples, cf. Joanna Dewey, "Point of View and the Disciples in Mark," *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers*, SBLSPS 21 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982): 97–106.

⁹⁴ Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 402–3.

In these chapters of Mark, the narrative audience may have some reassurance about how Jesus's fate and the fate of Jesus's faithful followers will resolve, but such reassurance does not overwhelm the suspense created by Jesus's emphasis on his looming suffering and by the disciples' developing failure to live up to the exhortation Jesus gives them. Instead, the disciples' behavior reinforces rather than eliminates suspense for the narrative audience.⁹⁵

Conclusion

In Mark 8:27–14:31, Jesus's honor continues to be highlighted consistently in both his public and private interactions. Jesus is affirmed to have status conferred by the divine, he displays his power and virtue, he establishes himself as authoritative in the temple, and he is hailed as a ruler coming into his rule. At the same time, the narrative suggests a change is on the horizon: Jesus will soon experience a great deal of shame and suffering, which he prophesies about repeatedly. Ultimately, this foreshadowing in Mark 8–14 provides a roadmap to the audience and some consolation about the narrative's eventual resolution, but it also creates a great deal of suspense. Then, when the narrative does move from anticipation to actualization of Jesus's prophecies, the shame he experiences is agonizing. To this I turn in the next chapter.

⁹⁵ And of course, those characters referred as "disciples" are not the only followers of Jesus in Mark. Cf. Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 30–32.

CHAPTER 6

SPIRALING SHAME: MARK 14:32–15:37

Mark 8:27–14:31 simultaneously continues to build Jesus’s honor and prophetically foreshadows violent and shameful turmoil for him. As these chapters progress, such prophecy builds suspense for the narrative audience. Beginning with the Gethsemane scene in 14:32–51, the narrative shifts from an emphasis on prophecy to the actualization of prophecy, from impending suffering and shame to their enactment. When the events in store for Jesus begin, they set in motion a series of interactions in which Jesus is not only humiliatingly, violently abused but also rejected and abandoned by everyone around him, friend or foe, with seemingly no exceptions. Beginning with 14:32–51, Jesus experiences rapidly spiraling shame that results in his dehumanizing death.

The Narrative Shift in Mark 14:32–51

The move from prophecy to actualization of prophecy, and the accompanying shift from the momentum of Jesus’s honor to his spiraling shame, immediately follows Jesus’s conversation with his disciples on the Mount of Olives (14:26–31), in which he insists upon their imminent abandonment and they respond with indignance. What Tannehill describes as the narrative audience’s “emotions of tragedy” and recognition of “the approach of disaster” are quickly confirmed as Jesus and his disciples come to Gethsemane in 14:32.¹ In 14:32–51, first, anticipation is heightened even further about prophesied events, and then Jesus’s prophecies begin to be realized.²

¹ Tannehill, “Disciples in Mark,” 402–3.

² There is also a shift to the present tense in this chapter (which also occurs elsewhere in Mark). According to Gundry, “The unusually high concentration of verbs in the historical present tense...displays the excitement of Mark

Jesus's actions and words at Gethsemane suggest not only that his prophesied suffering and shame are near but also that, as a consequence of this, he is close to a breaking point. In fact, while earlier in the narrative Jesus spoke about his coming trials almost impassively, he now emanates desperation. Upon arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus begins "to be amazed [*ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι*] and in anguish [*ἀδημονεῖν*]" (14:33). Previously, in 9:15, *ἐκθαμβέομαι* connoted positive amazement and was used to describe one man's awestruck response to Jesus. Here, however, it negatively connotes being overwhelmed, as is suggested by the paired verb *ἀδημονεῖν*, meaning "to be sorely troubled" or "to be in anguish."³ Further, Jesus tells his disciples that his "soul is deeply grieved to the point of death" (14:34). Going off by himself, he then falls (*ἐπίπτειν*) to the ground praying that, "if possible, the hour might pass from him" (14:35). The nature of Jesus's fall is ambiguous. It is possible that he falls accidentally as he is moving in desperation. On the other hand, the verb *πίπτω* also allows that he "throws himself down" intentionally.⁴ The former sense suggests that Jesus is frantic and is losing control of his bodily movements as the moment of his suffering and shame draws near. The latter sense, while suggesting that Jesus has control of his bodily movements, highlights the depth of his anguish that he would throw himself to the ground to pray. While Jesus is able to compose himself enough to pray "not what I will, but what you will," his desperation is clear.⁵

over Jesus' entrance into the Passion; for with that entrance the fulfillments of the passion predictions start coming to full flower" (*Mark*, 853). But cf. Decker, *Mark 9–16*, 198. Decker seems unconvinced by this explanation, asserting that "Gundry appears to assume that the use of the present in this way is for vividness, but that is a controversial (if common) explanation."

³ "*ἀδημονέω*," *LSJ*, 21. In 16:5–6 as well, *ἐκθαμβέομαι* may have a more negative connotation.

⁴ "*πίπτω*," *LSJ*, 1406–7.

⁵ This minding of the will seems to be important for the author of Mark. The characterization of Herod Antipas (6:14–29) and Pilate (15:1–15) reveal how reckless submission to one's desires can lead to tyranny, immorality, and disaster. Jesus's moral formation of the disciples also concerns the will—the will to keep one's life or to lose it, to be first or to be last (8–10). So consult Smith, "Tyranny Exposed," 282–85. Here, Jesus aligns his actions with the will of God rather than his own will, revealing that the desire to do good in the face of suffering and disgrace is difficult even for those who are exemplars. Cf. Collins, "Noble Death," 486.

At 14:41–42 Jesus narrates the actual onset of his suffering and humiliation. He declares, “The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Humanity is handed over into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let’s go. Behold, the one who betrays me has drawn near.” The remainder of the scene serves as a segue into the scenes to come, during which Jesus’s public honor spirals downward as he is repeatedly shamed.

The shame begins with a kiss and a greeting from Judas, who declares, “My master [ῥαββί]” upon approaching Jesus (14:45). The irony here is thick, since the term ῥαββί honored its recipient as a teacher or master, but its use in 14:45 coincides with betrayal.⁶ Similarly, a kiss signified respect and loyalty. During the imperial period, it was the means by which a client greeted his or her patron, and it was part of the official greeting for an emperor (it also occurred in more informal contexts as a simple greeting and sign of affection).⁷ Judas’s kiss is precisely a signal (σύσσημον, 14:44); however, it signifies not loyalty but its opposite, betrayal, and thus, rather than showing respect, it dishonors.

Judas’s signal is intended for the crowd (ὄχλος)—which is sent by chief priests, scribes, and elders—that arrived with him. In response to the signal, the crowd “threw [their] hands upon him [Jesus] and seized [ἐκράτησαν] him” (14:46). Here, ἐκράτησαν connotes being taken into custody, hence the NRSV’s translation “arrested.” It also connotes a physical, violent action. Consequently, the more general meaning of κρατέω as “conquer or prevail over” also informs the sentiment of 14:46.⁸ For Jesus to be the object of this verb is to be dominated.⁹

⁶ A similar, though less consequential, phenomenon occurs when the Pharisees and Herodians approach Jesus in 12:14, calling him “Teacher” but intending to undermine him (cf. 12:19).

⁷ Nicolas Wiater, “Kissing,” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 7:3773–75. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 684–85.

⁸ “κρατέω,” *LSJ*, 991.

⁹ Cf. 12:12; 14:1; and John’s arrest in 6:17. Elsewhere in Mark, the term often has a positive or neutral connotation (1:31; 5:41; 7:3, 4, 8; 9:10; 9:27). Its use in 3:21 is ambiguous, frequently interpreted negatively.

In turn, Jesus asks why he is being arrested like a bandit (ληστής) with “swords and clubs” (14:48). In the early Roman Empire, Jewish bandits may have often been considered heroes by the Jewish peasantry and consequently protected by them. Josephus even depicts an instance in which Jewish peasants incite bandits to action in the name of justice (*Ant.* 20.118–36).¹⁰ Thus, Jesus’s question *could* actually point to his status as a champion of the people against hegemonic and oppressive powers that be. Nonetheless, Jesus’s question seems to have a negative connotation. Perhaps this is because, for those who sent the crowd to arrest him (especially the aristocratic elders and chief priests), bandits would be agents of disorder and instability as well as a threat to hegemony.¹¹ Far from civil or upstanding, bandits were dishonorable from the perspective of such groups.

The comparison of Jesus to a bandit makes the role of the ὄχλος in the scene particularly interesting. Crowds in Mark have overwhelmingly been distinguished from politically and religiously elite groups, although this is not to say that no crowds include religiously or politically elite persons (consider Jairus in Mark 5).¹² On the whole, they have not tended to represent the interests of the elite. This particular crowd is sent by elite and prominent groups (chief priests, scribes, and elders), which probably suggests that they are distinct from such groups. Crowds in the Gospel have also tended to support Jesus, and he has frequently helped them.¹³ Consequently, it is not necessarily in the best interest of this crowd to arrest Jesus, whose actions thus far in the narrative may have been disruptive to the elite but have supported the masses. The crowd *does* arrest him, however, and

¹⁰ Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 69–76.

¹¹ On the social location of these elite groups: Sanders, *Judaism*, 517. On the role of bandits vis-à-vis the elite: Horsley, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 61–69.

¹² Cf. chapter 4 n42.

¹³ Of course, there have been a few crowds that have responded negatively to Jesus. Cf. 5:15–17; 6:1–6. Cf. the following footnote.

violently so, rejecting his work on behalf of the masses and treating him with the contempt that the elite would have for a bandit.

It is not clear how the chief priests, scribes, and elders have gone from fearing the crowds (11:18, 32; 12:12; cf. 14:2) to employing a crowd for their purposes. Perhaps this crowd is forced to arrest Jesus; after all, one crowd member is the slave of the high priest (14:47). Perhaps this group of people was with Jesus at Simon's house (14:3–9) and had the same negative response to Jesus as did Judas. If so, they may have been provoked by that interaction to betray Jesus, as Judas apparently was.¹⁴ Such is only speculation, however. Although the precise way the crowd's behavior has come to pass is not specified, the linking of the crowd with the chief priests, scribes, and elders suggests that these latter groups in some way have influenced—or, as Ahn Byung Mu suggests, manipulated—the crowd.¹⁵ Most significantly, the crowd's behavior constitutes a break from Jesus's typical relationship with crowds and signals a shift of the momentum of his public favor. Resultantly, the major barrier to the local Jewish leadership's desire and plan to destroy Jesus seems to be disappearing.

In addition to questioning the manner of his arrest (i.e., that he is treated like a bandit), Jesus seems also to take issue with the place and time of his arrest. He insists, "Day after day I was with you in the temple, and you did not arrest me" (14:49). Linking the occurrence of *ληστής* in 14:48 to Jesus's statement in 11:17 that the temple leadership has turned the temple into a "den of robbers [*ληστῶν*]," Collins suggests that Jesus's statement might be "a reproach for their lack of courage in

¹⁴ The entire controversy of 14:3–9 was prompted by "some people" (*τινες*) who were displeased with the woman's use of the oil.

¹⁵ Cf. Ahn, "Jesus and the Minjung," 139. Ahn avers, "To get the *ochlos* on their side, the rulers had to bribe them. For instance, when Jesus was arrested the rulers are said to have given money to mobilize the *ochlos*—a fact which indicates that strength of the *ochlos*. However, the fact that they were mobilized in such a way does not mean that they were necessarily anti-Jesus but that they could be manipulated." There is no actual indication, however, that the money given to Judas in 14:11 is to be shared with the crowd. I do agree with Ahn, however, that the crowd's mobilization is linked to their ability to be manipulated.

arresting him on that occasion, because of his popularity with the crowd (11:18; cf. 12:12), and especially for their conspiracy to arrest him ‘by deceit,’ instead of openly (14:1).”¹⁶

Jesus’s words might be understood as a challenge against those arresting him or, more likely, their commissioners, and his final retort, “so that the scriptures might be fulfilled,” can be read to suggest he has the upper hand in the scene. Here, however, there is no slinking away by his adversaries, who have finally enlisted a crowd to do their bidding. Indeed, rather than marveling at his words, this crowd is against him. Instead of Jesus’s retorts resulting in his honor, we learn that “all left him and fled” (14:50), certainly a reference to his disciples in light of 14:26–32.¹⁷ An additional character is also said to be present: an unnamed young man who is associated with Jesus in an unspecified manner and is wearing only a linen cloth. He, too, abandons Jesus, running away naked after also being seized (κρατοῦσιν; 14:51–52). Whatever else mention of this young man might mean, his naked abandonment of Jesus appropriately ends the humiliating scene.¹⁸ Jesus no longer builds public honor but loses it as the trials he foretold begin.

Jesus’s Shame Compounds

The dishonor Jesus experiences in the Gethsemane scene of Mark 14 begins a sequence of spiraling shame that compounds throughout the passion narrative. In fact, until 15:38, the narrative

¹⁶ Collins, *Mark*, 686. She also suggests that Jesus might be reproaching them for arresting him at all, since “there was nothing unlawful in his public teaching.”

¹⁷ At first, one of Jesus’s disciples tries to resist Jesus’s arrest by drawing a sword and striking the slave of the high priest (14:47). This is clearly not successful, nor is such defensive behavior sustained. Although some scholars have tried to argue that the individual who acts in 14:47 is not one of Jesus’s disciples, Dale B. Martin argues compellingly that the individual is a disciple. Consult Martin, “Jesus in Jerusalem: Armed and Not Dangerous,” *JSNT* 37 (2014): 3–24, esp. 5n3. Martin’s larger argument is that the historical Jesus brought his followers to Jerusalem armed to join an angelic army in an apocalyptic battle that would overthrow the current leadership and establish the kingdom of God on earth. Such historical matters are not the focus of this project, however.

¹⁸ Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 688–95. Collins explains that the phrase *συνηκολούθει αὐτῷ* in reference to the young man could either signify that he is a follower of Jesus or that he tries to follow after Jesus when Jesus is being taken away under arrest. She also provides a thorough history of interpretation with regard to this young man.

emphasizes a series of intense beatings, mocking and taunting, and ultimately crucifixion, all occurring publicly. As such, the Jesus who has been powerful is now physically weakened. What is more, Jesus is rejected or abandoned by group after group until it seems that no one, not even God, is left in support of him. He was previously famed and followed as a charismatic teacher and healer; he has been affirmed by the divine as son of God. Now, all oppose him, denying association, delighting in his humiliation and torture, or in the case of the divine remaining conspicuously absent.

On the discourse level, certain details in these scenes may remind the narrative audience of Jesus's power and honor. Overwhelmingly, however, these details are not perceived or well received by characters in the story. As a consequence, the narrative audience may sometimes be reminded of Jesus's honor but cannot, for the time being, allow such knowledge to trump the shame Jesus experiences. In this portion of the Gospel, the audience is denied the satisfaction of Jesus's honor prevailing. This rhetorical impact of Mark's passion narrative is similar to the rhetorical impact of the early Greek novels during the protagonists' trials. For example, in *Callirhoe*, even though glimpses of Chaereas's honor remain while he is enslaved and separated from Callirhoe, the overall plot progression prevents the narrative audience from focusing on or resting assured in such positive moments.¹⁹

Condemned by the Council

Jesus is brought before the council of the high priest, chief priests, elders, and scribes in 14:53, 55–59. The council seeks testimony that will justify executing Jesus, but they are initially unable to find any—even false testimony—that can be substantiated. Asked by the high priest to defend himself against the testimony, Jesus says nothing: “But he was silent and answered none of the charges” (14:61). Jesus's silence here is often interpreted positively. Moloney, for instance,

¹⁹ As noted in ch. 5, Callirhoe holds a funeral to honor Chaereas while he is enslaved (4.2), and she defends Chaereas's nobility to Artaxates (6.7). Additionally, Chaereas retains half the city's support during his trial (6.1).

observes that Jesus has no need to respond “to confused and contradictory witnesses” since “the Jewish legal tradition supports his innocence (Deut 17:6, 19:15).”²⁰

In terms of honor, Jesus’s silence might be understood positively or negatively. In a yet unpublished conference paper, Scott K. Brevard has argued that Jesus’s silence in this scene should be understood as shameful. Brevard analyzes silence in Greco-Roman literary texts, finding that silence was multivalent. He notes, “If we view Jesus’ silence as prudence (in line with Plutarch) or as a defense (in line with Philo and Philostratus), we can interpret this action admirably, as many scholars do. However, if we view this response as lacking or consenting (in line with Cicero and Quintilian), we may be more inclined to see Jesus’ silence as dishonorable or shameful.”²¹ Brevard then considers how silence functions in Mark and finds that silence commanded by Jesus functions differently in Mark than silence as a failure to respond in conflict and challenge situations, which is dishonorable. For Brevard, Jesus’s shameful silence is an example of dramatic irony, since the Gospel audience understands Jesus’s silence to fulfill his earlier prophecies that he would experience shame.²²

Brevard’s reading of this scene tracks with the Roman idea that “words had weight when the speaker’s reputation, *persona*, *fama*, *nomen*, life were risked in speaking,”²³ since a failure to speak under scrutiny could either reflect self-conscious inadequacy or foolish, shameless brazenness.²⁴ On the other hand, it is possible to read Jesus’s silence as an honorable transformation of shamelessness into a refusal to be mastered by one’s circumstances in keeping with certain groups of the imperial

²⁰ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 303.

²¹ Scott K. Brevard, “Jesus’ Silence (Mark 14:60–61a) in its Socio-Historical and Narrative Contexts” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, San Diego, CA, 24 Nov 2019), 23. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 703–4.

²² Brevard, “Jesus’ Silence,” 23–29.

²³ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 61.

²⁴ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 74–79.

period. As Barton explains, “‘Saint’ Cato does not respond to insult; he does not blush; he does not defend himself; he does not play the game; it is beneath him. Everything might move around him, but Seneca’s Cato is unmoved (*Epistulae* 104.30). ‘Through it all,’ according to Velleius, ‘he was nearer in spirit to the gods than to other human beings’ (2.35.2).”²⁵ This more positive reading could be supported by Moloney’s point that Jesus has no need to respond when those testifying against him cannot even agree.

Thus, it is possible to understand Jesus’s silence in 14:61 as honorable or shameful; however, even if the narrative audience interprets Jesus’s initial silence positively, Jesus does not remain silent throughout the entire scene, and when he does speak, his words are not well received by the other characters in the scene. Pressing Jesus again, the high priest asks, “Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed One?” (14:61). To this Jesus replies, “I am, and ‘you will see the Son of Humanity seated at the right hand of power’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’” (14:62). Here, Jesus answers, asserting his high status as messiah, son of God, and Son of Humanity; however, just as in the Gethsemane scene, Jesus’s retorts are not met with approval from a crowd or acquiescence by his opponents. Instead, the high priest tears his clothes, asserts that there is no more need for testimony, and calls for a decision from the council, insisting, “You have heard the blasphemy” (14:64). Others present at the council agree: “they all condemned him as liable to the penalty of death” (14:64).

Immediately, some council members spit upon Jesus, blindfold him, hit him, and mockingly command him to prophesy before handing him over to the guards, who beat him as well. As such, they do not simply shame Jesus by rejecting his claims to status but also turn their shaming of him into sport, and Jesus into the object of their sport. As Barton explains, “In extreme forms of

²⁵ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 119.

‘desouling,’ the person doing the shaming treated the shamed as less than a full player in the former’s ‘game.’”²⁶ This kind of treatment is what Cataline cringes to think of when he asks his men, “Is it not better to die valiantly, than ignominiously to lose a wretched, inglorious life in which you end up being an object of derision in the eyes of some haughty person?” (Sallust, *Bell. Cat.* 20.9 [Rolfe, LCL]).

Jesus’s rejection by the council, which is representative in some ways of his religio-ethnic community, is unsurprising—the narrative has suggested for some time that these leaders wish to destroy Jesus, and Jesus himself has predicted such treatment. Nonetheless, the stark difference from Jesus’s typical interactions with such groups is jarring. Far from winning an honor challenge with the temple leadership, Jesus does not even get the last word in this scene. Instead, he is rejected by his opponents, condemned, and treated as an object of sport.

Abandoned by a Final Follower

When Jesus is initially taken before the council, Peter follows at a distance and goes to the high priest’s courtyard (14:53–54). This initially suggests that, despite 14:50, Jesus has not been completely abandoned by his followers; however, when the narrative returns to Peter in 14:66–72, it becomes clear that Peter’s behavior actually reinforces the complete abandonment of Jesus by his followers. While Peter is in the high priest’s courtyard, three times he is identified as one who was with Jesus. In response, he denies knowing what those around him are talking about (14:68), denies being one of Jesus’s followers (14:70), and finally begins “to curse and to swear an oath, ‘I do not know this man about whom you speak’” (14:71). In swearing this oath, Peter effectively stakes his own reputation on neither being associated with nor knowing Jesus.

²⁶ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 251.

Peter's behavior would make sense to an audience with Roman sensibilities about inclusion and exclusion. "If being a citizen in Roman was to have a share or a portion, the shamed were 'cut' out. Plautus's parasite Curculio warns the pimp Cappadox, 'No decent man would dare to stand together with you in the forum. Whoever appeared by your side would be blamed, observed, vituperated; he would lose his wealth and his credibility, and even if he did nothing wrong, people would talk' (*Curculio* 502–504)."²⁷ Peter is aware of the damage it would do his reputation to be associated with the now rejected and publicly shamed Jesus, and he wants none of it.

As Peter is one of Jesus's closest disciples, his actions are perhaps both exceptional and representative. On the one hand, Peter alone among the disciples has remained close by after Jesus's arrest (as Peter promised he would do), but of course he soon abandons his intentions. On the other hand, as one of the more prominent disciples, Peter sometimes speaks and acts in ways that seem representative of the larger group (cf. 8:29–30). This is not to suggest that the other disciples are to be presumed present in this particular scene but that Peter's refusal to associate with Jesus represents the group's desire to avoid such association as well. For their part, "Jesus' closest friends have completely failed to take up the cross and follow him."²⁸ On Mark's discourse level, this, of course, reflects negatively on the disciples; however, it also highlights, and contributes to, Jesus's shame. He is too damaging to the reputation of others for association. If there were any lingering hope that Jesus's followers have not abandoned him to suffer and be humiliated alone, with this scene the Gospel now removes such hope.²⁹ As for Peter, in 14:72 he may grieve the consequences of his behavior, but he does nothing to change that behavior for his own sake or for Jesus's sake.

²⁷ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 253.

²⁸ Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 403.

²⁹ The narrative audience learns in 15:40–41 that many of Jesus's female followers have not abandoned him, but the narrative gives no indication of this fact until Jesus has died.

Peter's grief is prompted by the second crow of the rooster, which reminds him of Jesus's prophecy about his threefold denial (14:30). According to Winn, the role of prophecy in Mark's passion narrative, including the prophecies Jesus makes about himself and his followers in the chapters leading up to the passion, is to remind the narrative audience of Jesus's divine prophetic power. Not only does Jesus predict his own death, he also predicts "numerous events that come to pass, including Judas's betrayal, Peter's triple denial, and the desertion of his disciples. Placing these events within the context of Jesus' prophetic voice not only emphasizes his divine power but also removes some of the shame and embarrassment associated with the failure of his followers. This failure and betrayal does not surprise Jesus, and thus he is distanced from the shame related to it."³⁰ Indeed, the fulfillment of Jesus's prophetic words in this and other scenes does remind the narrative audience of Jesus's prophetic abilities.³¹ I disagree, however, with the conclusion that this removes shame from Jesus. To the contrary, it reminds the narrative audience that, even when Jesus's disciples could not accept or even seem to fathom his coming shame, Jesus himself insisted that he would be shamed.

Rejected by the Crowd

After all of Jesus's followers have left him and the local leadership has condemned him, the crowd (ὄχλος) rejects him as well (15:6–14). This rejection continues the trajectory that began at least at Jesus's arrest (with possible hints forming in 14:3–9), where a crowd commissioned by the temple leadership arrests Jesus. As we have found, with few exceptions, up to the point of Jesus's arrest, when a crowd surrounds Jesus, it consistently responds positively to him. The crowd that does the bidding of the temple leadership in arresting Jesus represents a significant break with the typical

³⁰ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 153.

³¹ This ability sets Jesus apart from the protagonists in *Ephesian Tale*, who must learn of their fate from an oracle.

positive behavior of crowds in Mark. Here, too, the crowd acts in opposition to Jesus. Granted the opportunity to have a prisoner released from custody, the crowd chooses Barabbas, who is associated with political insurrectionists guilty of murder. The crowd commands Pilate to crucify Jesus and is unconcerned to offer a good reason why Jesus should be crucified when Pilate asks, “What evil has he done?” (15:14).

Once again, the crowd’s opposition to Jesus is catalyzed by the temple leadership (here, the chief priests), who “stirred up the crowd” (15:11). This time, the influence of the chief priests is shown overtly to manipulate the crowd.³² As Malbon notes, the chief priests, scribes, and elders coopt the crowd to arrest Jesus (14:43), to testify against him at the council (14:53, 56), and to reject Jesus completely. She avers, “By the time Jesus is delivered to Pilate, the chief priests have the crowd well under their control (15:8, 11, 15).”³³ She couples this rejection by the crowd with the abandonment of Jesus’s disciples to emphasize that Jesus’s followership leaves him completely alone to face the Jewish leadership: “Both the disciples and the crowd, who were in opposition with Jewish leaders because they followed Jesus, abandon Jesus, who must then face the opposition of Jewish leaders alone.”³⁴ The loss of the crowd’s devotion to Jesus (however loosely constituted the crowd might be) does mean a loss of followership, which in itself contributes to Jesus’s public humiliation. It also, more basically, represents a loss of public status underscored by the abandonment of Jesus’s friends and the indictment of those in positions of political power. Jesus’s spiraling shame further intensifies with the involvement of Pilate.

³² Cf. Ahn, “Jesus and the Minjung,” 139.

³³ Malbon, “Disciples/Crowds/Whoever,” 123.

³⁴ Malbon, “Disciples/Crowds/Whoever,” 123.

Failed by Pilate

Before the crowd insists that Jesus be crucified, Jesus is bound, handed over to Pilate, and questioned by him (15:1–5). Pilate asks Jesus whether he is “the king of the Jews,” to which Jesus merely responds, “You say so” (15:2).³⁵ When he last spoke (14:62, to the high priest), Jesus openly affirmed his own status as messiah, son of God, and powerful Son of Humanity.³⁶ In contrast with that scene, Jesus’s vague response in 15:2 is probably strategic. Here, in a context in which the questioner has political power to prosecute Jesus as an insurrectionist, Jesus answers with avoidance. That is, he avoids *denying* his status as king (in keeping with his behavior in 11:1–11, where he allows himself to be touted as king in triumphal fashion) but also avoids *affirming* this status in a way that implicates him as an insurrectionist, since he is not an insurrectionist.³⁷ While Jesus’s self-understanding has political ramifications (cf. 13:27, 14:62), such ramifications will not fully manifest until a future, eschatological point. Jesus is indeed a kingly messianic figure, but his work is not to restore a politically independent kingdom of Israel, and it is not to lead a rebellion against Rome.³⁸ What is more, Jesus is not king only of the *Jews*. As the Gospel has demonstrated by comparing Jesus with the emperor and attributing divine sonship to him, Jesus’s kingly authority has cosmic scope and significance. As such, Jesus is best served by neither directly affirming nor directly denying Pilate’s question about his kingship.

³⁵ Malbon understands Jesus’s ambiguous answer as “positive enough to seal his death but noncommittal enough to disvalue the discourse. Whereas others speak sarcastically of Jesus as ‘*King of the Jews*,’...Jesus speaks seriously of the *kingdom of God*. The Markan Jesus consistently deflects honor away from himself and toward God” (*Mark’s Jesus*, 172). But while in this scene Jesus certainly is not grabbing honor or power, and he does not openly embrace the claim in Pilate’s question, his response does not actively deflect honor toward God.

³⁶ He does describe himself as “seated at the right hand of power,” and thus by no means dismisses God’s honor and prominence. In Malbon’s interpretation of 14:61–62, Jesus accepts the honors of “Christ” and “Son of the Blessed One” only reticently and only as a means to not “save” his own life” (*Mark’s Jesus*, 190, cf. 191–92).

³⁷ Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 713.

³⁸ On this specific point, I am in agreement with Roskam, who argues that Jesus’s messianic identity does not mean he is a “royal pretender” over Israel (*Purpose of the Gospel of Mark*, 166–69). I am not in full agreement with Roskam’s larger argument, however, since she claims that Mark’s depiction of Jesus is in no way political.

Although Jesus's statement in 15:2 is much more ambiguous than in 14:62, once again, the response he receives from the Jewish authorities is harshly negative: the chief priests begin to accuse him of "many things" before Pilate (15:3). When Jesus does not defend himself against these charges and Pilate asks him why, Jesus's continued silence causes Pilate to "wonder" (*θαυμάζειν*, 15:5). As is the case when it occurs in Mark 5:20 and 12:17, *θαυμάζω* often connotes "marveling" in the sense of honoring or admiring someone or something; however, it can also more generally connote curiosity.³⁹ In one occurrence in Mark—when Jesus is astonished at the unbelief of those in his hometown in 6:6—its connotation is negative. If Pilate is convinced of Jesus's innocence (which, as I discuss next, I believe he is), then his "wondering" could be positive marveling, neutral curiosity, or even possibly negative astonishment.⁴⁰

Even if Pilate's response is one of admiration and honor, however, the events in 15:6–15 show him to be complicit in the public shaming and demise of Jesus. The crowd approaches Pilate and requests the customary release of a prisoner, and Pilate offers them Jesus, whom he calls "the king of the Jews" (15:9).⁴¹ His rationale is given: "For he knew that the chief priests handed him [Jesus] over on account of jealousy" (15:10). When the crowd resists his suggestion, asks for Barabbas, and cries out to Pilate to crucify Jesus, Pilate responds by asking, "Why? What evil has he committed?" (15:14). Pilate's offer to release Jesus and his response to the crowd suggests that he believes Jesus to be innocent. Despite this, Pilate acquiesces when the crowd persists, "desiring to

³⁹ Cf. "*θαυμάζω*," *L&J*, 785.

⁴⁰ Helen K. Bond understands Pilate's response to be "ordinary wonder or bewilderment at a man facing a death sentence who will not defend himself" (*Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, SNTSMS 100 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 108–9). Bond's point is to differentiate Pilate's wonder from religious perceptivity, i.e., "The Roman governor is amazed at Jesus but, like others in the story, has no perception of his significance."

It is not necessary that Jesus's silence in 14:61 and 15:5 have the same connotation, but to interpret them with different connotations would require explanation.

⁴¹ Cf. Collins, "Son of God among Jews," 405. Collins suggests that Pilate's statements about Jesus are somewhat mocking. Similarly, Bond believes Pilate's statement to be mocking (*Pontius Pilate*, 111). However, for a discussion of Bond's larger argument, consult n43 below.

do what was satisfactory to the crowd [βουλόμενος τῷ ὄχλῳ τό ικανόν ποιῆσαι]” (15:15). He then beats Jesus and hands him over to be crucified.

In Mark 1:7, when *ικανός* is used, it invites comparison between John the Baptist and Jesus, with the estimable John proclaiming himself “not sufficient” to untie the strap of Jesus’s sandal. In 15:15, the term does not draw comparison in the exact same way, but it does relate to evaluation, in particular what (or who) Pilate deems important and worthwhile. Pilate values pleasing the whims of an angry crowd rather than acting justly toward a person he believes to be innocent. As Winn argues, Pilate’s behavior reveals him to be a weak ruler lacking the intellect and virtue that would be expected of a Roman leader.⁴² While on the discourse level Pilate’s behavior paints him in a negative light, on the story level it pleases those in opposition to Jesus, whose fervor is mounting and whose numbers are growing. As such, Pilate contributes to Jesus’s public shame by permitting Jesus’s crucifixion to happen because he deems Jesus’s innocence less important than the crowd’s capriciousness.⁴³ If Pilate’s wondering in 15:5 is actually marveling, any honor such marveling

⁴² Adam Winn, “‘Their Great Ones Act as Tyrants over Them’: Mark’s Characterization of Roman Authorities from a Distinctly Roman Perspective,” in Skinner and Hauge, *Character Studies*, 194–214, esp. 209. As Winn explains, “Pilate attempts to thwart the plans of the chief priests, who only arrested Jesus out of envy (v. 10), by offering the release of Jesus to the crowd (v. 9). However, the Jewish authorities thwart Pilate’s plans by instigating the crowd to ask for Barabbas rather than Jesus.”

⁴³ In her analysis of Pilate’s portrayal in Mark, Bond argues that “Pilate is not to be understood as a weak impotent figure but rather as an astute governor who handles a potentially difficult case with a certain amount of mockery and at the same time a great deal of political shrewdness.” She suggests that Pilate’s behavior is a “calculating” move that takes seriously the chief priest’s jealousy and thus the “threat to law and order” that Jesus poses. Pilate’s question to the crowd has a mocking tone, since “the Jews are an occupied people, [thus] they can have no king.” More fundamentally, it tests/challenges the crowd’s loyalty to Jesus, revealing that the crowd is unwilling to be faithful to him. If Pilate believed Jesus to be innocent, he could at this point release Jesus, having learned what he needed to about the volatility of the political situation, but he does not. Bond, *Pontius Pilate*, 104–13. While Bond makes a very intriguing argument, Winn highlights issues with her interpretation. In particular, Bond’s interpretation does not account for “the use of the contrastive conjunction *δέ*,” which places the action of the chief priests (stirring up the crowd) in contrast with Pilate’s efforts to thwart their plans. More significantly, it seems, Bond does not satisfactorily account for Pilate’s wishes to satisfy the crowd in 15:15. “Bond claims that irony is again present in the text and that Pilate seeks to satisfy the desires of the crowd that he himself created. But such a reading seems forced and unnatural.” Winn, “Their Great Ones,” 208–9. I agree with Winn’s assessment; however, *if* Bond is right, then Pilate directly and intentionally, rather than unwittingly, contributes to Jesus’s shame and demise.

affords Jesus is eventually overshadowed by Pilate's failure to insist on Jesus's worthiness over the crowd's.⁴⁴

The Crucifixion

With the failure of Pilate, Jesus has now been rejected and shamed by close followers, the general public, local religio-ethnic leaders, and now a Roman governor. In what follows, the human rejection of Jesus continues, with Jewish elite and commoners alike disdaining him further and Roman agents and even criminals joining in to deride him. This rejection manifests itself as part of Jesus's execution, a crucifixion carried out in imitation of the parading of a captive in a Roman triumph—a doubly humiliating spectacle at Jesus's expense.

Jesus as Dehumanized and Ostracized Object

Ancient crucifixion was, as John Granger Cook refers to it, “a miserable and shameful death.”⁴⁵ To crucify was one way to engage in what Barton refers to as toxic shaming. Because crucifixion was final in nature, it shamed in a more or less irreversible way.

Roman crucifixions tended to be reserved for slaves and non-citizens, although there were exceptions.⁴⁶ Crucifixion occurred for a variety of reasons, including banditry, piracy, political disturbance (e.g., rebellion), slave revolts or disobedience, and crimes of soldiers.⁴⁷ Fundamentally,

⁴⁴ Pilate's submission to the crowd is especially interesting in light of the crowd's manipulation by the temple leadership. That is, Pilate shows himself to be controllable by a group that is not even controlling itself.

⁴⁵ Cook, *Crucifixion*, 418.

⁴⁶ John Granger Cook, “Roman Crucifixions: From the Second Punic War to Constantine,” *ZNW* 104 (2013): 1–32, esp. 2.

⁴⁷ Cook, “Roman Crucifixions,” 1–32, esp. 32. Cook lists other reasons, sometimes alleged, for crucifixion as well: “poisoning a ward (a tutor and citizen), aiding in the seduction of a Roman matron, spying for rebellious slaves (Gavius, a citizen), murder committed by a slave, divulging the secret name of Rome (a citizen), falsely accusing Septimius Severus of consulting astrologers concerning Commodus's fate (a citizen), ‘marrying’ Claudius's wife (a citizen), the murder of Pompey, fighting in the Mithridatic wars (by slaves who were subsequently captured), taking part in the predation of tax farmers (a slave), refusing to testify falsely against a women's son (a slave), selling imperial favors (a eunuch), theft, slaves' informing against their masters, sacrificing children, and arson (the Christians).”

the question of who should be crucified by Rome and the reasons for crucifixion related to status and power: crucifixion “provided a public arena for the assertion of status or, more precisely, lack thereof.”⁴⁸ Those who did not have the status of citizen were subject to this degrading manner of punishment and death at the hands of powerful Rome. As such, crucifixion made an implicit statement about the inferiority of non-Romans.⁴⁹ Whoever its victim, however, “its primary purpose” was “to emphasize the victim’s final irrevocable rejection from the civic and international community” and to deny any rights to the individual.⁵⁰ Thus, crucifixion was a way of dishonoring those who lacked a certain claim to status and belonging.

The exact form of crucifixion even in the Roman world alone could take many forms, in part because “crucifixion was a punishment in which the caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full rein.”⁵¹ While protocol varied, trends in the evidence suggest that crucifixion often entailed intense torture and the humiliating “public display of a naked victim.”⁵² Drawing on Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44.4), Martin Hengel describes crucifixion as the “basic punishment to which the *addita ludibria* [added mockeries] were added.”⁵³ That is, crucifixion itself was a humiliating punishment, and it provided liberal opportunities for furthering that humiliation however one desired. The public

⁴⁸ Philip John Hughes, “Dishonour, Degradation and Display: Crucifixion in the Roman World,” *HARTS and Minds* 1 no. 3 (Winter 2013–2014): 1–13, esp. 6.

⁴⁹ Hughes, “Dishonour, Degradation and Display,” 6–7. Consider Philo’s account as he describes an attack on the Jewish community in Alexandria, perhaps suspected of being on the verge of revolt. Some of the Alexandrians were dragging the bodies of Jews who had already been violently killed. Philo states, “While those who did these things like actors in a farce assumed the part of the sufferers, the friends and kinsmen of the true sufferers, simply because they grieved over the misfortunes of their relations, were arrested, scourged, tortured and after all these outrages, which were all their bodies could make room for, the final punishment kept in reserve was the cross” (*Flaccus* 72 [Colson, LCL]).

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Aubert, “A Double Standard in Roman Criminal Law? Death Penalty and Social Structure in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome,” in *Speculum Iuris, Roman Law as a Reflection of Social and Economic Life in Antiquity*, ed. J.-J. Aubert and A. J. B. Sirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 94–133, esp. 117.

⁵¹ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 25.

⁵² Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 87.

⁵³ Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 26–27.

nature of crucifixion and its associated torture contributed to the victim's humiliation because it served to demoralize and degrade the victim in the presence of crowds, depriving the victim of any sense of control over one's own body or one's death. Further exacerbating the dishonor of crucifixion, sometimes executed people were denied right to burial, an honor otherwise generally afforded to those who died. Thus, even after a crucifixion ended, its victim very well could be tainted with further dishonor.⁵⁴

The portrayal of Jesus in Mark 15:16–32 is well within what Roman crucifixion often entailed, and the violent display of domination, abuse, and humiliation amounts to a final rejection of any sense of human belonging that Jesus may have had. First, in front of everyone in the courtyard of the palace, the Roman soldiers ridicule Jesus, making a vulgar parody out of his supposed kingship. They cloak him in purple, fashion a crown of thorns, and pretend to pay homage to him but spit on him and hit him over the head instead (15:16–20). In so doing, the soldiers do not merely dishonor Jesus by publicly challenging and rejecting him; they go further and use parodic honors to treat him as a dehumanized object of sport.⁵⁵ Later, the soldiers crucify Jesus either naked or wearing only a loincloth, since they take away the purple robe in 15:20 and divide his clothes among themselves in 15:24. Jesus is crucified with an inscription of his charge, reading “The King of the Jews.” He is placed between two bandits (ῥηστές)—a fitting juxtaposition given this is how he has been treated since 14:48—and even *they* taunt him (15:27, 32). Passersby taunt him irreverently

⁵⁴ Hughes, “Dishonour, Degradation and Display,” 3–10. Hughes explains that right to burial was standard except for “gladiators, prostitutes, soldiers in battle and undertakers, all of whom were viewed as inherently unclean, tainted by death and dishonour: *infamia*.” For a treatment of crucifixion and burial, consult John Granger Cook, “Crucifixion and Burial,” *NTS* 57 (2011): 193–213. Cook explains that burial could be but was not always denied to the crucified.

⁵⁵ Cf. Barton, *Roman Honor*, 251. Consider also Barton’s analysis of Seneca, *Ira* 2.33.3–6: The distinguishing quality of severe and alienating shaming was the lack (or perceived lack) of collaboration from others in maintaining one’s face....Dining at the palace with the emperor, drinking toasts, wearing crowns and unguents might have been honors—in other circumstances. But they were profound humiliations to the knight Pastor because they compelled a grieving father to wear a mask of gaiety and gratitude.” (250)

(βλασφημέω) as well, calling for him to come down from the cross if he is truly powerful. The chief priests and scribes make fun of Jesus, the supposed messiah and king of Israel, for being unable to save himself (15:29–32). With no followers left, Jesus is rejected and humiliated from every human angle; he is a societal outcast who now belongs to no group now meeting his final, dehumanizing end.

Jesus as a Triumphal Captive

The portrayal of Jesus's crucifixion in Mark 15 is also suggestive of a Roman triumph, creating such a parallel for the second time in the Gospel. In Mark 11:1–11, Jesus's procession into Jerusalem echoes the triumphal procession of a Roman emperor. Here, Jesus is once again associated with a triumph; however, instead of being portrayed as the triumphator, he is depicted as a triumphal captive.

T. E. Schmidt has drawn helpful comparisons between Jesus's crucifixion in Mark and the Roman triumph. In finding several details of the crucifixion account in Mark to echo the details of a triumph, however, Schmidt argues that Jesus is the triumphator in these scenes. According to Schmidt, the gathering together of the whole cohort of soldiers at the Praetorium, or military headquarters, is what would happen prior to a triumph (15:16). The purple ceremonial robe and crown are similar to what would be given to a triumphator to wear (15:17). The soldier's mocking praise of Jesus ("Hail, King of the Jews!") may be suggestive of a formulaic response shouted during a triumph (15:18). Jesus is led out and, it seems, carried as a triumphator would be in a triumphal procession (15:20). Simon carrying Jesus's cross next to Jesus may symbolize the official who carries a double-bladed axe and walks next to a sacrificial bull, which is identified with the triumphator (15:21). The crucifixion takes place at the Place of the Skull (or Head), reminding of the Capitoline Hill as the final destination of a Roman triumph (15:22). The mention of wine offered to Jesus

draws associations between the triumphator, the sacrificial bull, and the divine, whose identities would converge during the libation and sacrificial acts (15:23). References to the timing of Jesus's crucifixion match the approximate time span of a triumph: a day (15:25, 33). During a triumph, captives would wear placards announcing their crimes, just like Jesus has a placard with his charge (15:26). Finally, Jesus is crucified between two criminals, the soldiers' "mock equivalent of those displayed on either side of an enthroned ruler" (15:27).⁵⁶ Drawing upon Schmidt's argument, Winn argues that the centurion's proclamation, "Truly this person was the Son of God" (15:39), is a response to the entire crucifixion—or triumph—he has just witnessed.⁵⁷

As I discuss in the next chapter, the centurion's confession is an affirmation of Jesus's honor, and he may very well consider Jesus's crucifixion a triumph of sorts. His words suggest a comparison between Jesus and an emperor, to whom the title "son of God" was sometimes attributed. As the honor of triumph was limited mostly to the emperor during the imperial period, the high praise spoken by the centurion about Jesus draws associations between Jesus, the emperor, and triumph.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the progression of the narrative offers this connection in a positive sense only after Jesus has died.

While there are strong triumphal associations during the scenes of Jesus's crucifixion, it is just as fitting, if not more so, to read the narrative progression in 15:16–37 as portraying Jesus as a captive being paraded in a triumph than as a triumphator. First, there are certain issues with Schmidt's description of triumphs. In particular, Schmidt draws parallels between Jesus and the Roman emperor in 15:21, 23 by positing associations between the triumphator and the sacrificial

⁵⁶ T. E. Schmidt, "Mark 15:16–32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession," *NTS* 41 (1995): 1–18, esp. 15.

⁵⁷ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 157–62.

⁵⁸ On the limiting of the triumph to the emperor during the imperial period, consult Beard, *Roman Triumph*, 295–305.

bull. Schmidt avers that “a consistent feature in the numerous monuments depicting triumphs is the sacrificial bull, led along dressed and crowned to signify its identity with the triumphator.”⁵⁹ He also writes of a cup of wine offered to and refused by the emperor, then poured out on the altar or the bull, concluding, “The wine obviously signifies the precious blood of the victim, and the links between sacrificant, wine, and victim signify their identity. The connection is confirmed by the similar adornment of the triumphator and the bull. In other words, the bull is the god who dies and appears as the victor in the person of the triumphator.”⁶⁰ Schmidt’s presentation of the ritual sacrifice during a triumph ignores that the bull is sacrificed *to* Jupiter instead of representing the divine in some way. Further, Schmidt’s claims that (1) the wine “obviously” represents the victim’s blood and (2) the sacrificant, wine, and victim are all identified with one another are seemingly based only on his own inference, since none of the sources he engages makes either suggestion.⁶¹

Second, the notion that Jesus is a triumphal captive offers a more consistent explanation of the narrative details than the notion that Jesus is triumphator.⁶² The Roman triumphal procession, concerned with featuring the dominance of Rome and its general (later, its emperor-general), entailed parading captured enemies, especially the most notable captives, including nobles, prefects, and royal commanders along with their families and close associates. Of special importance were enemy kings and chiefs, who were often staged with some grandeur in order to further highlight the

⁵⁹ Schmidt, “Mark 15:16–32,” 9. Some of the monuments Schmidt cites are not depictions of triumphs but of other ceremonies altogether.

⁶⁰ Schmidt, “Mark 15:16–32,” 11–12.

⁶¹ Nowhere does Ryberg, the source which Schmidt utilizes for the monumental images, suggest any sort of significance for the scenes. Inez Scott Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art*, Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 22 (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1955). Schmidt cites Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 7.72.15–18; Juvenal, *Sat.* 12.8; Cato, *Agr.* 132, 134; and Ovid, *Fast.* 4.778 for texts that mention the wine used in sacrifice, but, again, these texts describe no association between wine, victim, and triumphator. In fact, Schmidt cites these sources (including Ryberg) only in his description of the sacrificial details. As Schmidt offers his explanation of the significance of the wine in Roman triumphs, he does not draw upon any source.

⁶² Schmidt himself likens Jesus to the triumphal captive at points in his explanation.

prestige of the conquering emperor/general.⁶³ Royal captives sometimes sported placards and were sometimes dressed in royal (including purple) attire as they were led through the procession.⁶⁴

Ultimately, the parading of captives was about humiliation of those captives. “Normally, prisoners were shown chained or bound....They were scorned and humiliated, and at times they were whipped and executed. Their very defeat justified the cruel treatment, as did their former misdeeds against Rome.”⁶⁵ The captured could be humiliated by mocking, especially if they had made any public claims (often against Rome) now shown to be arrogant and unfulfilled. Spectators would also participate in the jeering.⁶⁶ Executions of the “most prominent, famous, or dastardly” prisoners were part of the Roman cultural agenda, though how often execution actually took place is unclear. The frequency of actual executions is less important than the fact that this detail was part of the Roman propagandistic agenda: perception often matters just much as reality.⁶⁷

The triumph as spectacle—dependent upon the presence and engagement of spectators—reinforced and made possible the honor granted the triumphator and the shame bestowed upon the captives. The crowd’s active engagement made effective the parading of the victims. Himself in exile, Ovid envisions a triumph of Augustus and Tiberius over the Germans. He imagines the activities of the crowd: “So then all the people will be able to view the triumph, reading the names of captured towns and the titles of leaders, beholding the kings with chains upon their captive throats

⁶³ Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Culture and Representation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 129–33.

⁶⁴ Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 120–21. How often these particular events occurred in reality or only in literary imagination makes little difference.

⁶⁵ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 156. Cf. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 133.

⁶⁶ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 156–58. Drawing upon K. M. Coleman, Östenberg mentions the treatment of Jesus as an example of “the Roman penal character in general” (Coleman, “Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *JRS* 80 (1990): 44–73, esp. 47.

⁶⁷ Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 128–32, esp. 128.

marching before the garlanded horses, seeing some countenances turned to earth as becomes captives, others grim and forgetful of their lot” (*Tris.* 4.2.19–24 [Wheeler, LCL]). Ovid goes on to envision spectators identifying the captives to one another (4.2.27–46).⁶⁸ The vanquished captives and the victorious generals of triumphs were indeed a spectacle for Roman crowds: “That splendid, highly ritualized public display of victor, victim, and victory, actual and represented, passed in parade to the cheers of the multitude.”⁶⁹

Certain features of the Markan crucifixion narrative are reminiscent of a triumphal scene in general: the gathering together of a Roman cohort, the act of processing, and the movement toward a place designated as a “head.” Other features, rather than directly paralleling the treatment of a triumphator, mimic the treatment a triumphal captive—especially a captive of some prominence—would receive as a means of putting that person in his place and establishing Roman superiority over him. Jesus is insulted and abused (beyond the limited insults given a triumphator). He is displayed and paraded in some grandeur as he is given mocking obeisance (“Hail, King of the Jews!”, 15:18) intended to ridicule the notion that he would think himself a king in Rome’s empire. Jesus’s charge is displayed on a placard and spectators who witness his display jeer at him as well. As happened, or at least was said to happen in popular and literary imagination, with Rome’s more prominent captives, Jesus is executed, and in a manner generally reserved for foreigners, rebels, and the like.

Through all this, the soldiers mockingly honor Jesus for the sole purpose of deriding him, of exerting dominance over him before leading him to his death, as happened to the victim in a triumph. As we will find, one character comes to view the victim as the victor, but this becomes

⁶⁸ He then describes the splendor of Augustus triumphing: “High above them in the car of victory, thou wilt ride, O Caesar, clad in purple before the faces of thy people as old rite bids. Throughout thy course thou wilt be applauded by the hands of thy subjects, from all sides flowers will fall and cover thy path. With their temples all garlanded in the laurel of Phoebus the soldiers will chant ‘io, io triumphe’ in loud voices” (4.2.47–52 [Wheeler, LCL]).

⁶⁹ Richard Brilliant, “‘Let the Trumpets Roar!’ The Roman Triumph,” in *The Art of Ancient Spectacle*, ed. Bettina Bergmann and Christine Kondoleon, Studies in the History of Art 56 (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1999), 221–29, esp. 222.

clear only once Jesus has already died. For the moment, there is only humiliating rejection and display. Rejected by every human group and insulted by many, Jesus offers no display of power or defense of himself in response.

Abandoned by God

At this point, what seems already to be complete rejection of Jesus and total loss of public status takes on a new level. As becomes apparent in 15:34, not only has Jesus been rejected by all human groups—friends, community, and imperial forces—he also believes himself to have been rejected by God. In agony he shouts from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” At this point, mocked and abused, crushed by local and imperial powers, Jesus is completely alone. Mark portrays Jesus’s suffering and humiliation as undeserved, borne out of jealousy and hatred. Nonetheless, the status Jesus gained throughout the narrative has unraveled, and even God does not affirm him—at least not in this moment. Instead, for the moment, even Jesus’s status as son of God seems to be in question.

Jesus’s nadir parallels what Chaereas experiences during a low point in his own shame and suffering. After a series of intense sufferings, Chaereas finds out that it is up to the Persian king to determine whether he will be reunited with Callirhoe. Becoming despondent, he considers himself worse off than when he was a slave. Twice Chaereas attempts suicide, and twice his friend Polycharmus saves him, which Polycharmus has done previously as well. Chaereas lashes out, insisting that, if Polycharmus had not saved him, he would have avoided attack, slavery, crucifixion, “and a king more cruel than the cross” (6.2 [Reardon]). He has seen Callirhoe but was unable to embrace her. Worst of all, “It is unheard of; it passes belief—Chaereas on trial to determine whether he is Callirhoe’s husband! And even this question, for what it is worth!—the malicious deity will not allow to be decided. In dream and in reality alike, the gods hate me!” (6.2 [Reardon]). Indeed, it

seems as though the gods are determined to bring about Chaereas's demise when the king decides he wants to keep Callirhoe for himself. In *Callirhoe*, as in Mark, the suffering and misfortunes faced by the protagonists are exacerbated excruciatingly by the belief that divine favor has left them.

It is sometimes suggested that Jesus's outcry, in which he quotes Ps 22:1, should be read as an invocation of Ps 22 as a whole, which ends on a victorious note. On this reading, Jesus's words should be understood as a cry of suffering alongside a statement of trust in God's faithfulness. For instance, Donahue and Harrington take up this interpretation, finding the dividing of Jesus's garments and the jeering of the bystanders as other allusions to the psalm.⁷⁰ Winn makes much the same argument, concluding that the citation of Ps 22:1 in Mark 15:34 foreshadows vindication at the same time it communicates Jesus's suffering.⁷¹ It is Ps 22:1 alone that Jesus cries out from the cross in Mark, however, not the remainder of the psalm. The words he speaks bemoan abandonment. If the rest of the psalm is called to mind for the narrative audience, the narrative audience must also accept that any rescuing of Jesus comes only *after* he dies shamed and alone in 15:37, not *before* death as in Ps 22:21.⁷² Further, the response of other characters to Jesus's question reinforces the notion that he is utterly alone. Those nearby think Jesus is crying out to Elijah to help, and one person, offering him a drink, says, "Let us see whether Elijah comes to take him down" (15:36). Elijah does not come, and neither does any other divine or human agent. Instead, Jesus dies alone: "And after Jesus emitted a great noise, he breathed his last" (15:37).⁷³

⁷⁰ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 451.

⁷¹ Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 153–56. He suggests that this reference comes only after parallels to Ps 22 occur throughout Mark 15.

⁷² Cf. Boring, *Mark*, 430. "While Mark and (some of) his readers were presumably aware of the psalm as a whole, which concludes on a trusting and triumphal note, to reduce these words to an incipit of a prayer of trust violates the Markan portrayal of Jesus as [in his outcry]...experiencing the ultimate abandonment."

⁷³ Winn understands Jesus's outcry in 15:34, the darkness that occurs in 15:33, and his loud cry in 15:37 to be details aimed to emphasize his greatness (*Reading Mark's Christology*, 153–57). I find these details to be ambiguous at best. Winn may be right to propose that the darkness would remind a Roman audience of the deaths of great leaders (such as

Conclusion

From Mark 14:32 until 15:37, Jesus undergoes a series of events in which he is severely shamed. In particular, he is rejected by group after group until even God—who has previously verbally affirmed Jesus—is silent and inactive. Coupled with this rejection, Jesus is subjected to the humiliation of crucifixion as well as mocked and displayed as if he were the captive in a Roman triumph. For all practical purposes, it seems that Jesus's established honor has completely unraveled on the story level of the narrative: his fame and reputation are no more, and he is rejected especially by his community leaders for the blasphemy of claiming to be messiah and son of God. Although the narrative audience knows Jesus *to be* the messiah and son of God, the notable absence of divine affirmation when Jesus needs it most creates an overwhelming challenge to this knowledge; however, just when the narrative reaches this nadir, it shifts once again.

the philosopher Carneades [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, 6.64] and Julius Caesar [Plutarch, *Caes.* 69.3–5; Virgil, *Georg.* 1.463–68]); however, inasmuch as it is associated with Amos 8:9, as Winn suggests, the darkness communicates only judgment and the seeming absence of God. Jesus's ability to call/cry out from the cross in 15:34,37 is not straightforwardly impressive either. In the narrative the cry in 15:34 is interpreted by some bystanders as an unanswered cry for help (15:36). Winn contends regarding 15:37, "Given that crucifixion was essentially a death by suffocation..., the ability of the victim to cry out loudly from the cross would have been surprising to the ancient reader and would have evinced the significant strength of the victim." But there are several ancient accounts of crucified individuals (fictional and nonfictional) saying much more from their crosses, including smiling, singing, or speaking at length. Cf. Cook, "Roman Crucifixions," 29n154. In *Ephesian Tale*, for instance, Habrocomes prays a lengthy and eloquent prayer of petition to an Egyptian god (4.2).

CHAPTER 7

HONOR RESTORED: MARK 15:38–16:8

Mark's Gospel is known for its quick pace. Thus, it is not surprising that the narrative moves quickly from featuring Jesus's spiraling shame to restoring his honor. Beginning immediately after Jesus's death, he is progressively vindicated as he is honored by several individuals. On Mark's story level, Jesus's public honor is not completely restored; however, the affirmation he receives from the divine and humans—as well as the literary presentation of this affirmation—suggests overwhelmingly that Jesus's honor, and not his shame, prevails in the end. This is true even in light of Mark's difficult ending.

God's Affirmation

Immediately after Jesus dies, the temple veil is “torn (ἐσχίσθη) in two, from top to bottom” (15:38). Though not explicitly identified as such, this event represents a divine act, suggested by the passive use of σχίζω and the fact that the action takes place in the temple, widely understood as a special locale for God's presence.¹ This divine act is best understood in light of the single other use of σχίζω in Mark: in the prologue when the heavens are torn apart (σχιζομένους) as God declares

¹ For most first-century Jews, it was believed that the temple housed the presence of God—not exclusively, but in a special sense. Sanders, *Judaism*, 108–9. For an audience attuned to Greco-Roman, and especially Roman, culture, the relationship between the temple and the divine presence could have easily communicated, since Roman temples at least “housed the image of the deity;” similarly, Greek temples housed the presence of the god in the form of a large cultic image. J. R. C. Cousland, “Temples, Greco-Roman,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 1186–88, esp. 1187. Of course, the Jewish temple had no image of God, but the assumptions about the divine activity/presence in temples would likely translate.

Jesus to be “my beloved son” (1:10–11).² There, the tearing is part of a theophanic disruption (seemingly only experienced by Jesus) in which God’s affirmation establishes Jesus’s high status, at least for the narrative audience. By echoing the event in 1:10–11, the tearing of the temple veil in 15:38 once again betokens divine affirmation of Jesus.

According to Josephus, the outer veil of the temple depicted “a panorama of the heavens” (*J.W.* 5.5.4 [Thackeray, LCL]); elsewhere, writing of the tabernacle, he explains that the Holy of Holies, itself set apart by the inner veil, represented the heavens (*Ant.* 3.6.4). As David Ulansey argues, the language in 15:38 of the temple veil tearing would bring to the minds of those in the narrative audience familiar with the temple “an image of the *heavens being torn*,” which would have recalled to mind “Mark’s earlier description of the heavens being torn at the baptism.”³ Although God does not speak at Jesus’s death, the connection between 15:38 and 1:10–11 signals God’s affirmation—and the beginning of God’s vindication—of Jesus.⁴ The centurion’s confession reinforces the connection with Mark’s prologue and the affirming nature of God’s action.

The Centurion’s Confession

Although God does not speak in 15:38, the connection between this scene and Mark’s prologue deepens when the Roman centurion echoes the words God spoke at Jesus’s baptism, saying, “Truly this man was son of god” (15:39). Once again, Jesus receives the special accolade υἱὸς

² There, too, God is not explicitly identified.

³ David Ulansey, “The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark’s Cosmic *Inclusio*,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 123–25, esp. 125. In discussing the connection between the veil and the heavens, Ulansey is referring only to the outer veil; however, appealing to Josephus’s discussion of the Holy of Holies, Collins points out that the tearing of either veil could signify the heavens being rent (*Mark*, 762).

⁴ Collins also understands this as a vindicating act. She states, “It is highly likely that the event [in 15:38] symbolizes the [divine] vindication of Jesus, although precisely how it does so is concealed as much as revealed” (“Noble Death,” 498). Collins is actually discussing the pre-Markan passion narrative at this point in her article; however, in this case her observations apply to the Markan passion narrative as well. She suggests that the tearing could symbolize a revelation of divine presence or power emanating from the temple, Jesus’s exaltation via ascension to heaven, or both (498–99).

θεοῦ with its imperial and divine significance.⁵ For the first time in the Gospel, this honor comes from a human character.⁶ By echoing the words of God at Jesus's baptism, the centurion not only honors Jesus but also unknowingly reinforces the implication of 15:38 that God affirms Jesus.

The centurion's high praise for Jesus is significant not only because it reinforces God's affirmation of him but also because the centurion is a Roman agent. The enactment of Jesus's crucifixion by Romans represented his full rejection from Roman and, more generally, human belonging (a notion reinforced by the repeated rejections Jesus experienced). The centurion, however, uses Roman political language to proclaim the opposite of such rejection—Jesus belongs and is deserving of honor.

Mark explains that the centurion's affirmation comes after he has "seen that he [Jesus] breathed his last [ἐξέπνευσεν] in this way" (15:39). This statement echoes the specific language of 15:37 (ἐξέπνευσεν). Surely the centurion takes into account everything that he has seen throughout Jesus's crucifixion, but there is something about Jesus's final moments in 15:34–37 that specifically prompts the centurion's declaration.⁷ Perhaps for Mark's centurion it is that, in the last moments of Jesus's life, after he has undergone public insult, abuse, and rejection to the extreme, after he has been utterly humiliated, Jesus has shown no sense of shame but has steadfastly endured his suffering at each turn. Never once does he ask for mercy from or indicate wrongdoing to his abusers. When

⁵ For any among the narrative audience who might have ascribed a more Jewish connotation to the centurion's statement, this could also suggest Jesus's messiahship over Israel. So consult Collins, "Son of God among Greeks and Romans," esp. 93; cf. Collins, "Son of God among Jews," 406–8.

⁶ Of course, the high priest asks Jesus if he is the "son of the Blessed One" in 14:61 but renders Jesus's positive response as blasphemy (14:64).

Against the argument that the centurion's confession is not sincere, Collins aptly notes that no indication of mocking or misunderstanding is given in the text ("Son of God among Greeks and Romans," 96–97). Cf. Iverson's argument that the proclamation invites a climactic applause point for the narrative audience, since the audience is emotionally invested (enraged) by the mockery of Jesus during his crucifixion, and the centurion's confession offers relief to them ("A Centurion's 'Confession': A Performance-Critical Analysis of Mark 15:39," *JBL* 130 [2011]: 329–50).

⁷ Cf. Winn, *Reading Mark's Christology*, 161. Winn argues that the centurion's words are in response to the entire crucifixion/triumph. I think this is true in a larger sense, but the echo of 15:37 in 15:39 also suggests the catalyzing significance of the immediate context.

he speaks, he speaks directly to his God, bemoaning his plight only here and only inasmuch as it entails divine abandonment. Then, as Jesus cries out (wordlessly?) in 15:37, he draws attention to his suffering but still shows no specific concern for the taunts and jeers directed toward him.

Such lack of concern for insults to oneself may seem senseless in certain veins of Roman thinking, but Mark's centurion considers Jesus's final moments praiseworthy. He finds them so praiseworthy that he calls Jesus "son of god," signaling a comparison with the emperor and the imperial cult. When considered in terms of Roman triumphs, the centurion's response to Jesus makes good sense.

As is suggested in the writings of Livy, Tacitus, and the author of Lucius Verus's biography in *Historia Augusta*, the spectacle of parading defeated kings and highly notable people in triumph left a strong impression on its spectators.⁸ Livy, for instance refers to the display of a "royal prisoner of highest birth and greatest riches" as "the greatest of shows" (*History of Rome* 45.39.6 [Schlesinger, LCL]). One danger of parading captives in a triumph, however, was that the captives could upstage the one triumphing, that the victim could become, from the vantage point of the people, the true victor. This could happen because of the illustrious display of the chief prisoners, or it could be because of the immense pity the sight of the captive aroused in onlookers. "This problem underlies all mass spectacle: how do you control the gaze of the viewer?...In the triumphal procession, the grand nobility of the victims can draw the crowds. So also can the pathos of the prisoners on display."⁹ As such, the triumph was a paradox of sorts, asking one "to wonder who the victor really is and so what virtue and heroism consist in."¹⁰

⁸ Östenberg, *Staging the World*, 134–35. *Historia Augusta*, *Verus* 8.7; Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.38.1–2.

⁹ Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 136. Cf. 252: "What could he [the triumphator] do, standing helpless in the chariot, if he realized that the eyes of the spectators were being drawn increasingly to the glamorous prisoners or to the valiant battle-scarred soldier walking behind him?"

¹⁰ Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 133–39, esp. 138.

Such is the case for the Markan centurion. Just like that, from his perspective, the spectacle meant to debase has culminated in a display of true greatness and honor. The one put on display, humiliated, and led to his own execution captivates the attention and awe of his executioner. The one who is Rome's victim has become the victor. Taking it all in and watching Jesus die nobly, the centurion determines that this man is the truly deserving recipient of the designation "son of god."

The Female Followers' Faithfulness

In 15:40–41, after Jesus has died but before his death scene draws to a close, the narrative audience learns something that has been omitted until now: not *all* of Jesus's followers have abandoned him. While it still seems that Jesus's inner group of disciples (and anyone else included in the "all" of 14:50) has deserted him and is nowhere to be found, it is now revealed that several of his female followers have been watching his crucifixion "from afar" (15:40). Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and Salome are there along with "many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem" (15:40–41).

Much has been made of the mention of women in 15:40–41, especially because Jesus's female followers have not been featured throughout the Gospel narrative. Notably, Winsome Munro has argued that the author of Mark attempts to suppress the role of women in Jesus's ministry, admitting their importance and their presence at Jesus's cross and tomb only because early church testimony overwhelmingly attested to the women's historical presence at both.¹¹ Other scholars have resisted Munro's interpretation, finding instead a climactic contrast between Jesus's male and female followers at this point in the narrative.¹² Malbon notes the persistence of Jesus's

¹¹ Winsome Munro, "Women Disciples in Mark?" *CBQ* 44 (1982): 225–41.

¹² There are good literary reasons for resisting Munro's interpretation, which I discuss presently. An additional reason to resist Munro's interpretation (or at least exercise caution in adopting it) is that Munro's redaction-critical analysis relies upon unsubstantiated speculation about the specific circumstances behind the Gospel's production.

female followers when all other followers have fallen away. She argues that the timing of their visibility and faithfulness is rhetorically significant, as it simultaneously emphasizes both that discipleship is open to all people and that “among followers the ‘first will be last, and the last first.’”¹³ Similarly, both Susan Miller and Seong Hee Kim highlight that the narrative, rather than minimizing the women here, features their courage in standing by Jesus—even if at a distance—despite their vulnerability in the face of imperial oppression.¹⁴

Against Munro and with scholars such as Malbon, Miller, and Kim, I would argue that the specific mention of Jesus’s female followers seems less about an author’s attempt to suppress female disciples until the last possible moment and more about the women’s decision to stand by Jesus faithfully even in adverse circumstances. For the purposes of the present argument, the women’s behavior is especially meaningful precisely because it comes as a surprise. The previous forsaking of Jesus by his male followers contributed to the apparently complete abandonment of Jesus leading up to his death. Because of the prominence of Jesus’s male disciples in the Gospel narrative, the narrative audience could easily assume that no followers remained faithful to Jesus past the moment of Peter’s denial, since the narrative itself suggested as much. Now, however, the strategic mentioning of Jesus’s female followers supports the rebuilding of Jesus’s honor especially on the discourse level of the Gospel. Moments before, he was seemingly without a single follower, but now it is revealed that he has many.

¹³ Malbon, “Fallible Followers,” 43. Malbon is quoting Mark 10:31.

¹⁴ Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel*, 160–61; Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire*, 121–32. Cf. Malbon, who compares the women’s watching from a distance to the same behavior by Peter in 14:54 (“Fallible Followers,” 43). Malbon holds that by standing far off, the women reveal their fallibility, just as Peter did. Miller, too, notes the women’s fallibility.

Pilate's Wonder

After Jesus's death scene draws to a close, the restoration of his honor continues during the Gospel's final two scenes. Pilate's role in this restorative progression is noteworthy, if subtle. After Jesus dies, Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and asks for Jesus's body. Pilate, who is not aware that Jesus has died, "wondered if [ἐθαύμασεν εἰ] he had already died" (15:44). After summoning the centurion and receiving confirmation that Jesus is, in fact, dead, Pilate releases Jesus's body to Joseph.

When Pilate was last present in the Gospel, he was determining whether or not Jesus would be crucified. Then, too, Pilate wondered (ὥστε θαυμάζειν τὸν Πιλάτον) in response to Jesus, who remained silent while accusations were brought against him (15:5). Pilate's wonder in 15:5 was ambiguous, but even if it were interpreted positively, his subsequent actions (handing Jesus over to be crucified in order to please the crowd) undermined any honor afforded Jesus by his marveling. Here, too, Pilate's wonder is somewhat ambiguous. The grammatical construction ἐθαύμασεν εἰ is an expression used to note surprise and bewilderment, ranging in connotation from negative astonishment to neutral bewilderment to more positive wonder.¹⁵ It is unlikely that Pilate's response is markedly negative, since there is no clear reason why he would find Jesus's quick death offensive. Less clear is whether he marvels in awe of Jesus's quick death or simply finds it bemusing.

Regardless of whether Pilate marvels at or is bewildered by Jesus's quick death, in both 15:5 and 15:44 Jesus causes Pilate to pause and notice him. In both instances, once he takes special note of Jesus, Pilate's subsequent actions are keenly important. Before, Pilate disregarded Jesus for the sake of a crowd's appeasement. Now, Pilate notices Jesus and, after confirming that he is indeed dead, allows him to be honored by way of burial.¹⁶ Recall that burial was not automatically afforded

¹⁵ "θαυμάζω," *LSJ*, 785. By comparison, Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 1140 connotes surprise; Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.155 connotes surprise, perhaps negative astonishment; Plato, *Phaed.* 97a connotes bewilderment or positive wonder.

to Rome's crucified. Pilate would have had the prerogative to grant or deny requests to bury Jesus; he chooses to allow it.¹⁷

A Council Member's Venerating Acts

What Pilate permits—Jesus's burial—is requested and carried out by a member of the Jewish council, Joseph of Arimathea (15:43–46). He goes courageously to Pilate, asking to have Jesus's body released to him. Joseph, who has otherwise not been mentioned in the Gospel, is said to have been waiting in expectation for the kingdom of God. This expectation seems to motivate Joseph's desire to honor Jesus through burial. That is, Joseph's actions signal that Jesus, who dedicated his ministry to enacting and proclaiming the kingdom of God, is aligned with the activity of God and should be honored by humans, even in light of his humiliating rejection by society. As such, Joseph advocates for Jesus and affords him the honor of burial.

It is no small detail that Joseph himself is also described as an honorable (εὐσχήμων) member of the council, indicating that he is a respected person in good standing with, even part of, the Jewish leadership. This is significant for three closely related reasons. First, as a widely respected person, Joseph's public honoring of Jesus invites the larger community to honor Jesus as well. This is similar to the role of John the Baptist in conferring honor openly upon Jesus and thus inviting the community into the conferral process (1:7–8). As previously explained, when a “sufficiently distinguished” person honored another, “he granted [the second] a quantum of honour,” prompting the larger community to honor the second individual as well.¹⁸ Of course, the Gospel does not state

¹⁶ This is not to suggest that Pilate is now a follower of Jesus or understands Jesus's messiahship. As previously noted, Bond makes a similar point about Pilate's bewilderment in 15:5 (*Pontius Pilate*, 108–9).

¹⁷ Cook, “Crucifixion and Burial,” 193–213, esp. 213. Cook argues that Jesus's burial is historically plausible. As Cook demonstrates, Pilate's compliance is not highly exceptional in the Palestinian context; neither, however, was it a guarantee.

¹⁸ Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 48–49, esp. 48. Cf. ch. 4 “Honor Established” in this work.

how the larger community responds to Joseph's public support of Jesus. This does not mean, then, that Joseph's actions are efficacious in restoring Jesus's honor on a wide scale, but it merits mention that he is the type of figure whose actions *could* have such an effect.

Second, by honoring Jesus, Joseph is taking a risk, since other council members or the community at large could respond negatively to his actions and consider less of him for them. Joseph pays homage to Jesus despite this risk. Finally, Joseph represents at least one council member who now aligns with Jesus rather than rejecting him. When Jesus's followers abandoned him before his death, it seemed that all were deserters until the women's presence was noted in 15:40–41. Similarly, when the Jewish council rejected Jesus, it seemed to represent a unanimous front against Jesus by Jewish leadership. Now, Jesus is honored by one from among them.¹⁹

The Women's Anointing Efforts and the Young Man's Proclamation

In the Gospel's final scene (16:1–8), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (who were all present at Jesus's crucifixion) go to anoint Jesus's entombed body. Arriving, they are unable to do so, as Jesus's body is not present. Instead, they are greeted by a young man clothed in white who, inviting them to look for themselves, declares that Jesus is not there because he has been resurrected. Jesus's resurrection culminates his vindication by God within the Markan narrative—he is not only son of God, he is raised by God. Further, although the women do not actually anoint Jesus, their efforts bring him honor. The women's attempt to anoint Jesus once again indicates that the societal rejection enacted through his crucifixion is not final.

Interpreters sometimes focus on the possible negative implications of the women's trip to Jesus's tomb. Boring refers to the women as "blind to what God was doing in the life and death of

¹⁹ Cf. Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 31; "Jewish Leaders," 276. The character Joseph is one of several examples in Mark demonstrating that the Gospel resists absolutizing the characterization of groups who are friend or foe to Jesus.

Jesus” because they are “coming without hope to anoint a dead body.”²⁰ Munro holds that their action is depicted as “redundant, for it has been performed beforehand by the anointing woman of Mark 14:3–9.”²¹ Malbon argues, however, that the women were likely not present when Jesus was anointed in Mark 14, nor were they privy to Jesus’s private predictions about his resurrection in 8:31, 9:31, 10:33–34. Thus, she finds it unlikely that the narrator would expect the women themselves to anticipate Jesus’s resurrection.²² While Malbon raises a worthwhile point, it is not totally clear whether the women were privy to these private predictions or not. Throughout the narrative, the twelve male disciples are portrayed as constituting Jesus’s inner circle, and references to Jesus’s disciples sometimes seem to include only those twelve. Nonetheless, if women were indeed part of Jesus’s faithful following and should be understood as disciples (as Malbon herself argues), 15:40–41 retroactively calls into question who exactly has been present when Jesus is said to speak privately with his disciples. Among Jesus’s resurrection predictions in 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33–34, only in 10:33–34 is it explicitly stated that he is addressing the twelve (10:32). Therefore, it is possible—though by no means guaranteed—that these women *were* privy to some of Jesus’s resurrection predictions. Likewise, it is possible, though not certain, that they were at the home of Simon the Leper.

Despite the possibility that the female disciples witnessed Jesus’s resurrection predictions and his previous anointing, it is not necessary that the women’s attempt to anoint Jesus be interpreted negatively as an unnecessary act exemplifying only misunderstanding. Instead, the women’s anointing efforts reveal yet again their faithfulness to Jesus. They “seek to align themselves with him.”²³ Rather than being redundant, their intended anointing creates an *inclusio* with the

²⁰ Boring, *Mark*, 444.

²¹ Munro, “Women Disciples,” 239.

²² Malbon, “Fallible Followers,” 44. Miller also points out that the young man is waiting for the women at the tomb (*Women in Mark’s Gospel*, 178–79). If they are in the wrong by going to the tomb, why is the young man there?

²³ Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel*, 178.

anointing in 14:3–9, framing Jesus’s arrest, trial, and death with moments of honor.²⁴ The echo of 14:3–9 created by this framing reminds the narrative audience that then, too, Jesus was honored amidst difficult circumstances, but honored he was.

The task of anointing is interrupted before it begins, but the interruption brings the women the good news that Jesus has been raised. An unidentified “young man” (νεανίσκον) is the herald of this news (16:5–6). In the Gospel narrative, there is only one other mention of a νεανίσκος: the young man who fled naked from Gethsemane after Jesus’s arrest (14:51–52). The two men are likely not the same person, but they do invite comparison, being the only two characters identified in this way in the Gospel.²⁵ With the νεανίσκος of 16:5–6 comes a powerful reversal of images. The νεανίσκος in the Gethsemane scene abandoned Jesus, being stripped naked in so doing. In contrast, the νεανίσκος in 16:5–6 sits calmly and proclaims Jesus’s vindication. He is clothed in white and thus is a reminder of the glorified Jesus at the transfiguration.²⁶ The νεανίσκος of 14:51–52 participated in the rejection of Jesus by his followers; the νεανίσκος of 16:5–6 faithfully testifies about the resurrection to Jesus’s steadfast female followers. By commissioning the women to remind the other disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee, he also initiates the process of reconciliation between Jesus and the followers who forsook him. He commands, “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you” (16:7).

Through his proclamation, the young man in 16:5–6 testifies to Jesus’s vindication by God and catalyzes the reunion of Jesus and his followers.²⁷ He announces and ushers in the restoration of

²⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln has noted the framing effect of these two anointing stories (“The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7, 8,” *JBL* 108 [1989]: 283–300, esp. 288).

²⁵ As Collins asserts, if the young men of 14:51–52 and 16:5–6 were one and the same, the young man in 16:5–6 would be introduced as “*the* young man” rather than “*a* young man [νεανίσκον]” (*Mark*, 795).

²⁶ Collins, *Mark*, 795.

²⁷ And the women are invited to help catalyze this reunion as well.

Jesus's status as divinely ordained agent and teacher/leader. Of course, the reuniting of Jesus and his disciples is complicated by the women's response to the young man in 16:8—they run away, seized by “trembling and astonishment” and, afraid, say “nothing to anyone.” The women's response introduces a degree of uncertainty into this picture of restoration of honor for Jesus. While the women's silence does not nullify the rebuilding of Jesus's honor that takes place after his death and more specifically in 16:1–8, it does merit more discussion. I revisit this perplexing turn of events in the section entitled “Mark's Unsettling Ending,” first turning to a discussion of the literary structure of Jesus's vindication after his death.

Literary Structure and the Scope of Jesus's Vindication

The rebuilding of Jesus's honor that takes place after his death entails affirmation from various individuals (and one group, his female followers). The narrative arrangement of these affirmations creates a progression that mirrors the shame-inducing interactions Jesus had leading up to his death, although the post-death interactions are positive rather than negative. What results is a chiasm:

- A Followers, including a naked young man, abandon Jesus (14:32–51)
- B Council rejects Jesus (14:55–65)
- C Final follower (Peter) denies Jesus (14:54, 66–72)
- D Roman governor fails Jesus, and a crowd rejects him (15:1–15)
- E Roman soldiers abuse Jesus (and rejection by Jewish leaders and commoners, including criminals, is reinforced; 15:16–32)
- F God (seemingly) abandons Jesus (15:34)
- G Jesus dies shamed and alone (15:37)
- F' God affirms Jesus (15:38)
- E' Roman centurion proclaims Jesus to be “son of god” (15:39)
- C' Female followers revealed to be faithfully present (15:40)
- D' Roman governor “wonders” and permits burial (15:44)
- B' An esteemed councilmember buries Jesus (15:43–46)
- A' Female followers honor Jesus, learn of resurrection from a young man “clothed in white” who also foretells reconciliation with other disciples “and Peter” (16:1–8)

Two observations about this chiastic structure bear mentioning. First, it places special emphasis on Jesus's death as the climax of his spiraling shame and the turning point toward his honor being rebuilt. Jesus dies completely shamed and alone, but his virtue withstands his death, especially since his death further demonstrates his virtue. He does not succumb to the insults and the abuse; he cares not about the opinions of those around him. By not wavering even when faced with death, he also demonstrates his faithfulness to the kingdom he has espoused and enacted during his public ministry. In fact, Jesus understands his own death as a "ransom for many" (10:45). After all, the kingdom for which he dies brings healing, nourishment, and belonging to all who seek it. By refusing to forsake the kingdom even when it costs him his life and his reputation, he demonstrates his honor even to those who witnessed—and to some who contributed to—his shame. The moment of his defeat becomes the moment he prevails.

In the Greek novels, near death occurs frequently. The threat of death is usually precipitated by dangerous circumstances that arise as part of the protagonists' loss of status and experiences of shame.²⁸ At several points the protagonists even threaten to kill themselves or willingly embrace activities that have a high fatality risk in order to preserve their own honor (that is, by avoiding situations that would further compromise their honor or by actively seeking to die in glory), although they never actually die.²⁹ Instead, they are spared death, and eventually their honor/status is restored. Unlike in the novels, in Mark, Jesus is not spared death. The restoration of his honor occurs only once he has died. This contrast heightens the significance of the restoration of Jesus's

²⁸ In *Callirhoe*, Callirhoe's near-death at the beginning of the novel (when she is buried alive) occurs when Chaereas believes her to be unfaithful to him and thus attacks her (1.4–5).

²⁹ In *Ephesian Tale*, Anthia tries to choose death by suicide (poison) instead of marrying Perilaus and therefore becoming unfaithful to Habrocomes (3.5–6). In *Callirhoe*, Chaereas and Polycharmus join Egypt in war against Persia in order to die gloriously on their own terms.

honor: Jesus does not need to escape death to have his honor restored. In fact, the manner of and reason for Jesus's death (as he described it) become reasons why his honor is restored.³⁰

Second, although the rebuilding of Jesus's honor at the end of Mark happens quickly, the chiasmic structure lays stress on the significance of this rebuilding. Each individual or group that honors Jesus parallels an individual or group that abandoned or rejected Jesus leading up to his death. Thus, representatives from among those who previously failed and spurned Jesus now honor him. These honoring actions occur roughly in the reverse order from the shame-inducing interactions they parallel. The one notable exception is that the Gospel reveals Jesus's faithful female followers—a remnant of Jesus's followers parallel to the scene featuring Peter as a possible remnant—before Pilate learns of Jesus's death and permits his burial. If the chiasmic structure were consistent, these two scenes would be flipped. Overall, though, this inconsistency hardly disrupts the larger chiasmic rebuilding that clearly takes place.

Affirmation by God, a Roman centurion, several of Jesus's followers, the governor, an esteemed member of the council, and a young man amounts to significant honor given to Jesus from among the various groups who previously rejected him. Such affirmation is efficacious particularly on Mark's discourse level. On the narrative's story level, however, it does not seem that Jesus's public honor is fully restored. After all, those who honor Jesus ultimately amount to a small number of individuals. The centurion and Joseph are both members of larger groups and have the potential to influence those groups' perspectives; however, the narrative never suggests that something like this happens. What is more, the general public of the narrative, represented by the

³⁰ Cf. Daniel B. Glover, "Left for Dead: *Scheintod* in the Greco-Roman Novels and Acts of the Apostles," *PRSt* 46 (2019): 285–305, esp. 297. Glover argues that the apparent-death (*Scheintod*) scenes featuring the novels' female protagonists "attribute[e] to the characters a hint of immortality" and "move the 'apparently dead' farther from the realm of humanity and closer to the realm of the divine, so that one perceives the character as a unique admixture of human and divine." Jesus's actual (and not apparent) death in Mark does not offer an identical suggestion of immortality; nonetheless, Jesus's death does highlight his connection with the divine, since he is immediately affirmed by God, and his eventual resurrection is similarly suggestive of (eventual) immortality.

ὄχλος, is never said to realign with Jesus. Because ancient honor and shame had very public components in antiquity, it is difficult to conclude that Jesus's honor is restored to the narrative public in Mark.

Perhaps the limited restoration of Jesus's honor on the narrative level is meant to be in keeping with the situation in the first century: individuals and small groups associated with Jesus, but for most others, he was merely a failed revolutionary and a shamed, crucified criminal. Those who truly "saw" Jesus recognized him as the virtuous son of God who was faithful to God's kingdom even when it cost him everything and who would eventually return as the Son of Humanity. The discourse of the Gospel of Mark commends this Jesus to its narrative audience, a Jesus whose devastating undoing is not final, since the imperial and societal forces that have rejected him do not outweigh his, virtue, benefaction, power (even if not displayed at every point), and now reinforced divinely ordained status.

Mark's Unsettling Ending

When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome learn of Jesus's resurrection and are commanded to go share this news with the other disciples, they are said to run away in "trembling and astonishment [ἐκστασις]," saying "nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." With this final line, the Gospel concludes. The women's trembling, astonishment, and fear are all appropriate responses to the awe-inspiring manifestation of divine power that is Jesus's resurrection. Their response echoes the fear Peter, James, and John experienced at Jesus's transfiguration (9:6) and the amazement often inspired by Jesus's great deeds (ἐκστασις occurs also in 5:42; similar reactions occur in 1:22–28; 2:1–12; 5:1–20; 7:31–37; 9:14–29; 11:15–19).³¹

³¹ But cf. Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure," 285–87. Lincoln interprets the women's fear here and previous instances of the disciples' fear as negative. If the fear is negative and to be grouped with the silence, this only further reinforces the difficulty of Mark's ending.

It is jarring, however, that Mark ends suddenly with the women's silent retreat from the tomb, especially since they are explicitly commissioned to relay a message. Their silence initially complicates the restoration of Jesus's honor in two ways. First, it casts some doubt on whether Jesus will indeed be reconciled with those disciples who abandoned him.³² Throughout the Gospel, he has been a great leader. While many of his followers have remained faithful (15:40–41), the group that has been portrayed as his inner circle is still estranged from him at this point. Second, the women's silence, by potentially jeopardizing Jesus's reconciliation with his other followers, creates uncertainty as to whether the prophecy he spoke in 14:28 will be fulfilled: "But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." If one of Jesus's prophecies were to go unfulfilled, this would call into question his reliability and call into question whether other yet-unfulfilled prophecies, in which Jesus experiences additional glory, will themselves be fulfilled.

In further considering this complicating ending, it is useful first to turn once again to the Greek novels for insight. On the whole, the novels have been noted for their "strongly closural nature."³³ Two novels constitute exceptions to this tendency, however: Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* and Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Each of these novels creates open-endedness at its end by questioning, if subtly, the security of the relationship between the protagonists. *Callirhoe* ends with a letter from Callirhoe to Aphrodite in which the female protagonist asks the goddess not to separate Chaereas and herself again. Such a request inherently suggests the possibility of separation.³⁴ In *Leucippe*, Achilles Tatius creates "a more overt playful discrepancy between the

³² Collins argues that the focus of 16:8 (even "and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid") is on the awe the women feel after such an extraordinary experience. Their silence is part of this response, and "the text does not address the question whether the women eventually gave the disciples and Peter the message" (*Mark*, 800)). Indeed, the Gospel does not address this question, which I believe is precisely the point: the question remains open.

³³ Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity*, 178.

³⁴ Tagliabue, *Xenophon's Ephesiaca*, 75; M. Fusillo, "How Novels End: Some Patterns of Closure in Ancient Narrative," in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 209–27, esp. 217.

novel's beginning and ending."³⁵ Whereas *Leucippe* ends with the lovers Leucippe and Clitophon happily united and married with the blessing of their fathers, there is no explanation of or resolution to the novel's opening, in which Clitophon is in Sidon seemingly without Leucippe. The effect is that the narrative audience, "having compared the end with the beginning, would wonder why Cleitophon is in Sidon, why he seems to be unhappy, and where Leucippe is," which could lead to the view that "married life is not as blissful as Cleitophon had anticipated or he may even have lost his beloved again."³⁶

In contrast with *Callirhoe* and *Leucippe*, *Ephesian Tale* does have a more "closural" nature. Its lovers' relationship is secure in the present, and a pleasant future is foretold: "And they themselves lived happily ever after; the rest of their life together was one long festival" (5.15 [Anderson]). Nonetheless, open-endedness remains, since the oracular *mise-en-abyme* from earlier in the narrative, which foretells Habrocomes and Anthia's troubles and their eventual reprieve, is not fully fulfilled by the end of the narrative. As previously noted, Tagliabue reads the ending of the oracle as an external prolepsis, not to be fulfilled within the confines of the narrative:

And beside the water of the river Nile, to holy Isis
The savior you will afterwards offer rich gifts;
But still after their sufferings a better fate is in store. (1.6 [Anderson])

In the course of the narrative, this oracular external prolepsis creates suspense for the narrative audience. In light of the narrative's ending, the external prolepsis reinforces the notion that the protagonists' relationship is secure; however, it also suggests that undescribed events will lead the couple out of Ephesus to Egypt, creating a notable knowledge gap for the narrative audience between the novel's ending and the foretold event.³⁷

³⁵ Tagliabue, *Xenophon's Ephesiaca*, 75.

³⁶ I. Repath, "Achilles Tatius' Leucippe and Cleitophon: What Happened Next?," *CQ* 55.1 (2005): 250–65, esp. 260.

The ending of Mark also creates uncertainty about how events will resolve beyond the scope of the narrative. As with *Callirhoe* especially, Mark's ending offers some closure (Jesus is resurrected from the dead, as he prophesied) along with some indeterminacy (the women are supposed to relay a message, but they are said to leave in silence). In *Callirhoe*, indeterminacy concerns whether love will prevail. By contrast, in Mark the indeterminacy raised by the narrative ending introduces uncertainty about Jesus's followership and his prophetic word, both of which reflect upon his honor.³⁸ The stakes are different, but in both *Callirhoe* and Mark, the ending unsettles the narrative denouement.

Mark also has similarities to *Ephesian Tale* in that a yet unfulfilled prophecy contributes to uncertainty about how events beyond the narrative's ending will unfold. Xenophon does not call into question the lasting or happy nature of the protagonists' relationship but leaves open the question of how the prophecy of 1.6 will come to complete fulfillment. Mark's ending seems to call more into question: Jesus's relationship with his followers and his prophetic reliability, as previously noted. Closer consideration reveals, however, that Mark's ending does not actually challenge *whether* Jesus's prophetic word will be fulfilled; it really only leaves open the question of *how* it will be fulfilled—the same question left open at the end of *Ephesian Tale*.

Taking up Mark's difficult ending, Andrew T. Lincoln has demonstrated that, repeatedly throughout the second half of the Gospel, Jesus's prophetic words of promise (both of suffering and glory) are met with misunderstanding and failure by his disciples. In response to Jesus's passion predictions in 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33–34, his disciples display misunderstanding or negativity in 8:32–33, 9:32–34, and 10:35–41. Nonetheless, Jesus's predictions come true. In Mark 13, Jesus foretells of

³⁷ Tagliabue, *Xenophon's Ephesiaca*, 76. Tagliabue argues that this geographic shift is part of a larger emphasis in the novel on the couple's turn toward faithful love.

³⁸ The ending of *Callirhoe* could have implications for the protagonists' honor, however, if a possible second separation entailed the same types of circumstances as the first.

his power and glory as the Son of Humanity as well as the gathering of the elect (13:26, 27, 30), and his discourse also includes three warnings to keep watch (13:33, 35, 37). Then, in 14:32–42, the disciples fail three times to keep watch for him in Gethsemane. Finally, in 14:62, Jesus prophesies about the Son of Humanity returning on the clouds and is mocked, yet his prophetic reliability has just been confirmed outside, as Peter fulfills Jesus’s prophecy (14:30) by denying him three times (14:68, 70, 71). Consistently throughout Mark, when Jesus’s prophetic words are called into question by others, he proves reliable. In light of this, Mark 16:8 “alone—the failure of the women—is not the closure after all. It is vv. 7 and 8—the failure of the women juxtaposed with the promise that is able to overcome it.”³⁹

Rhetorically, Mark 16:8 does not threaten the fulfillment of 16:7 and thus does not jeopardize Jesus’s honor. Although the Gospel leaves open the question of how the matter gets resolved, it promotes a Jesus whose reliability outweighs his followers’ failings, a Jesus who will reunite with his followers and resume his role as their leader and teacher. In so doing, it reinforces, rather than undermines, Jesus’s honor even amidst indeterminacy.⁴⁰ What is more, the reminder of Jesus’s prophecy that “after I am raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee” (14:28) and the implication of 16:7 that this prophecy is nearing its fulfillment also recall for the narrative audience that certain other of Jesus’s prophecies remain to be fulfilled (consult Table 6). These prophecies feature Jesus in his full glory as the coming Son of Humanity. By recalling them, the narrative audience is further reassured of Jesus’s great honor.⁴¹

³⁹ Lincoln, “The Promise and the Failure,” 293–96, esp. 295–96.

⁴⁰ Malbon has pointed out that at the conclusion of the Gospel, Jesus is physically neither in Jerusalem nor in Galilee, “but somewhere in between; Jesus is in movement; he is ‘going before’ (16:7); he is on the way” (“Galilee and Jerusalem: History and Literature in Marcan Interpretation,” *CBQ* 44 [1982]: 242–55, esp. 253. Jesus’s liminal location suggests his kingdom work on earth remains unfinished.

For Malbon, Galilee represents order in Mark while Jerusalem represents chaos, and Jesus’s location “on the way” represents a tension between the two. But this contrast is a bit problematic, since Jesus experiences plenty of resistance in Galilee and plenty of affirmation in Jerusalem. Cf. Collins, *Mark*, 666.

Table 6: Jesus’s Prophecies about Himself That Are Not Fulfilled by Mark 16:8

Passage	Prophecy
8:27–9:1	“Whoever is ashamed of me..., of that person the Son of Humanity will also be ashamed whenever he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”
13:3–37	“They will see the Son of Humanity coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send the angels, and he will gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven.”
14:17–31	“No longer will I drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God....But after I am raised, I will go before you to Galilee”
14:62	“You will see the Son of Humanity seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

Supplements to Mark’s Ending

After the words ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ (“for they were afraid”) in 16:8, the NA²⁸ includes two separate sections of text in double brackets: a short paragraph of two sentences added onto the end of 16:8 and a longer section consisting of 16:9–20. These two double-bracketed sections are referred to as the shorter ending and the longer ending of Mark, respectively. Double brackets are a feature of the critical edition used to signify that the typically lengthy enclosed text is known to be a later addition but has also been of significance throughout Christian history. In the case of Mark, there is solid manuscript evidence to suggest that the earliest recoverable ending of Mark is ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ in 16:8, not only because of the manuscripts that attest to this ending but also because this ending explains all the known variants. A strong scholarly consensus (which has been challenged and defended on multiple fronts) holds this position.⁴² Despite their secondary nature, the shorter and longer endings to Mark were included in a number of early manuscripts (though the shorter ending, when included, was almost always included alongside the longer ending). The longer ending

⁴¹ The narrative audience might also recall Jesus’s yet-unfulfilled prophecies about his followers: coming persecutions (10:29–30; 13:9–13) and the “cup” that awaits James and John (10:39), but also “eternal life” for those who undergo persecution on his behalf (10:29–30) and the gathering of the elect when the Son of Humanity comes (13:27). These prophecies suggest that Jesus’s reputation will not be fully restored among the general public and the political powers that be, since Jesus’s followers will be mistreated by family and public officials, but it also suggests that some will remain faithful to Jesus and that his full and final vindication by God will be manifested at some point in the future.

⁴² For an overview of the issues at stake, consult Collins, *Mark*, 780–81, 797–99, 806–7.

especially became a standard part of the Markan text and was, until the modern period, generally taken to be original.⁴³

Collins suggests that the additional endings to Mark were added because the ending at 16:8 was deemed problematic or deficient, especially once Matthew, Luke, and John had been written.⁴⁴ For Collins, this evaluation of Mark's ending fails to recognize "that the silence of the women is a way of emphasizing the overwhelming mystery of the resurrection of Jesus and the terror inspired by the presence of an angel in the tomb announcing that event."⁴⁵ Whether the authors of these additional Markan endings understood or misunderstood the abrupt ending at 16:8, by virtue of their inclusion, the additions to the text suggest that for some there remained more to be said.

These additions not only address the question of whether the women carry out their commission, they also emphasize the rebuilding of Jesus's honor more overtly than does the earliest recoverable ending. In Mark's shorter ending, the women do pass along the message, and Jesus meets his disciples.⁴⁶ Both details emphasize Jesus's restored relationship with his followers and thus his role as a leader. They also emphasize the fulfillment of his prophetic word. The longer ending accomplishes these same ends, with the caveat that the persisting disbelief of Jesus's disciples provides a temporary roadblock to Jesus's restored relationship with his followers. Once this obstacle is overcome, however, Jesus's power and authority are emphasized even further. He commissions his disciples to spread the good news to all, declaring that all who believe will exorcise demons, speak in tongues, handle snakes, be immune to poison, and heal the sick. Now, the power that Jesus has exercised over humans and nature is passed not just to his immediate disciples but to

⁴³ Collins, *Mark*, 802–6.

⁴⁴ Collins, *Mark*, 803, 817–18. It is also possible that the authors of Matthew and Luke (and, theoretically, John) themselves found Mark's ending insufficient.

⁴⁵ Collins, *Mark*, 803.

⁴⁶ At least one manuscript omits the phrase "they said nothing to anyone." Consult Collins, *Mark*, 803.

all who will follow. The longer ending concludes with yet another divine affirmation of Jesus, who is ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of God. Whatever the precise motivations of the authors of these additional endings to Mark, they function to bolster the rebuilding of Jesus's honor at the end of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Within a handful of verses after Jesus's death, he receives vindication and affirmation from select members of every group that disowned him leading up to his death—every group except the general public. Of course, within the confines of the narrative itself, he is not reaffirmed or vindicated by any of the twelve disciples; however, he is affirmed by some of his other followers: the women who are faithfully at the cross and those who go to the tomb. The chiasmic arrangement of the affirmation Jesus receives after his death underscores the importance of his restored honor at the end of the Gospel. Although Mark ends suddenly and surprisingly, the unfulfilled command within the parameters of the narrative does not ultimately threaten the strength of Jesus's prophetic word, which has not failed in the Gospel thus far; Jesus will experience additional reconciliation with his disciples and additional glory from God. That Jesus's honor is not restored among Mark's narrative public may be fitting in a first-century context, but it does not inhibit the promotion of Jesus as an honorable, divinely approved agent for Mark's narrative audience.

CONCLUSION

As I noted in chapter one, the underlying question that drives my investigation is how the social values of honor and shame impact—and are reshaped in—the telling of the Gospel of Mark. Put differently, how might the Gospel of Mark mean (recall Malbon’s *how a text means*) to those familiar with Roman political and social realities? In particular, to what extent and in what ways does the Gospel feature Jesus’s honor and shame throughout the narrative? In order to answer these related questions, I first established a framework for understanding honor and shame in their first-century cultural context, a Roman imperial context also influenced by Greek culture. I began by focusing on ancient literary and archaeological evidence regarding honor and shame rather than beginning with a model based on sociological or anthropological studies of modern groups. This enabled me to build the framework—which accounts for dynamic and internally diverse natures of culture in general and honor and shame specifically—around the evidence rather than the reverse and prepared me to pursue “the fullest understanding of the historical material [here, the Gospel of Mark] in its own Greco-Roman context.”¹

As I stated in chapter 3, Roman honor was overarchingly related to public esteem and personal dignity as an assessment of one’s perceived worth. Barton explains that Roman honor was about the “face,” or public presentation of the self, informed by one’s self knowledge and conferred by others. “One’s face was one’s *persona*, one’s mask. The *persona* was composed of the reputation (*existimatio*, *fama*, and *nomen*), supported by effective energy (*virtus*), and enforced by a sensitivity to

¹ Tolbert, “Social, Sociological, and Anthropological Methods,” 270.

shame (*pudor*).”² Honor was a combination of reputation and character, of being well known, well liked, and deserving of both. It was about attending to and exhibiting modesty. High status, with its glory and reputation, was a marker of honor, especially when coupled with character.

Honor needed to be able to withstand scrutiny and difficulties. As Cicero once said, “The greater the difficulty, the greater the glory” (*Off.* 1.19.64 [Miller, LCL]). To be sensitive to and withstand insult, trials, or challenging circumstances proved one’s honor. There could come a point, however, when insult, humiliation, and infamy won out. In such instances, one’s public *persona* faltered as negative shame replaced honor, and in turn inadequacy, dehumanization, and rejection prevailed. At times, experiences of shame were transformed by some into opportunities to display one’s honor through shamelessness—that is, by embracing what was commonly deemed shameful as truly honoring, by refusing to be penetrated by humiliation, or by finding a different arbiter of honor (reason, truth, or the gods rather than one’s peers or the public).

Reading the Gospel of Mark in dialogue with this framework for first-century Roman notions of honor, I have argued that the Gospel robustly establishes and maintains Jesus’s honor on both the discourse and the story levels of the narrative, in keeping with standard notions of honor. The narrative features Jesus’s reputation, effective energy, and sensitivity to shame until partway through Mark 14, even affording him honors associated with emperors and the divine. I have also argued that the narrative shifts toward an overwhelming emphasis on Jesus’s shame at 14:32, with suspense-building prophecies foreshadowing this shift beginning with 8:27. From 14:32 until 15:38, Jesus experiences abandonment, rejection, and violent and humiliating treatment intended to signify that he is an outcast from every human community, and here divine approval is conspicuously absent. Nonetheless, the moment of Jesus’s utter demise—his death—becomes the moment at

² Barton, *Roman Honor*, 57.

which the narrative begins to rebuild his honor, and from 15:38 through the remainder of the narrative, he receives affirmation and homage from divine and humans alike. Ultimately, the narrative promotes Jesus's honor, although without fully reestablishing his public reputation.

Honor, Shame, and the Narrative of Mark

Returning to the central questions identified in the previous section, I begin first with, *how do honor and shame shape the narrative of the Gospel of Mark?* From start to finish, the Gospel is concerned with Jesus's honor.³ By establishing Jesus's honor, jeopardizing it, and recovering it, Mark insists that Jesus is an honorable agent of God who has ultimately withstood the worst dehumanizing shame.

In my efforts to bring this narrative emphasis into focus throughout this project, comparisons with the plots of the early Greek novels, especially *Callirhoe* and *Ephesian Tale*, have been key. These novels, which were also composed during the early Roman imperial period, employ the same sort of literary treatment of honor and shame over their narrative arc: establishment of the protagonists' honor, loss of honor, then restoration of honor. In particular, comparing the Greek novels with the plot of Mark has provided insight about the significance of the shift toward suffering and shame that occurs midway through Mark. Namely, the novels help demonstrate the following. First, Mark does not promote suffering as the true meaning of Jesus's messiahship over against the idea that Jesus's messiahship is about power and glory. Second, the Gospel does not build Jesus's honor early on in the narrative merely as a foil for true honor; rather, the honor Jesus gains in the first half of the narrative supports the narrative audience's positive understanding of him. Third, the narrative does not minimize Jesus's shame during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. While certain hints of Jesus's honor might be present during 14:32–15:37, the overwhelming emphasis is on Jesus's experience of humiliation and rejection.

³ This does not mean, of course, that the Gospel is exclusively concerned with Jesus's honor.

How have the comparisons with the novels yielded such insights? Importantly, in the novels, the protagonists' experiences of suffering and loss of honor become a heavy emphasis of the respective stories. These experiences (and in the case of *Ephesian Tale*, the prophecy about such experiences) captivate the narrative audience, who waits to find out whether the suffering and loss of status/honor will prevent the successful love of the protagonists. The novels are preoccupied with the protagonists' experiences of shame and suffering but only as obstacles to eventually restored love and honor. They do not promote the protagonists' suffering and shame over their honor, as if suffering and shame were somehow to be sought after in order to have true love. This is true even if the protagonists' experiences of suffering and shame do prove their love and their honor. Neither do the novels feature the protagonists' suffering and shame as a means of delegitimizing the honor they possessed early in the novels. The protagonists' loss of honor catalyzes their need to get it back in order to lead the lives they desire.

Just as the novels do not promote loss of honor and status for their protagonists, Mark's shift toward suffering and shame does not equal a promotion of suffering as the true meaning of messiahship. Instead, as with the novels, it presents an obstacle to be overcome, a puzzle to be solved: how can Jesus's honor survive something as utterly debasing as crucifixion? How can Jesus remain honorable when all his divine and human support unravels before him? The Gospel, like the novels, depicts Jesus's shame and suffering with heightened focus and in great detail in order to convey the depths of the challenge. In so doing, Mark depicts a problem in need of resolution when resolution seems almost impossible to imagine.

Again, as with the novels, resolution does come in Mark. In contrast to the novels, however, it comes not moments before death or demise, but after. Ultimately, Jesus's honor, like he, must be resurrected, and resurrected it is. During his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus's reputation was destroyed, and his virtue and modesty were questioned (at least on the story level of the narrative).

Now, his reputation is reestablished as his greatness is recognized by individuals from the very groups who rejected him. His virtue is reiterated by the climactic focus on the moment of his death, which he previously described as an act of benefaction: a “ransom for many” (10:45). It is also emphasized by the mention of Joseph’s commitment to the kingdom—a poignant reminder of the sacrifice Jesus was willing to make for the kingdom. Further, Jesus is proven not to have been immodest in his self-estimation (messiah, son of God, Son of Humanity), as yet again he is affirmed by the divine.

Neither Jesus’s intense shame nor the restoration of his honor upon his death delegitimizes the honor he was granted in the first several chapters of the Gospel. That is, while Jesus is portrayed as losing honor in the midst of the narrative, the implication is not that his previously granted honor failed to be true honor. Similarly, Jesus’s honor at the end of the Gospel does not represent a markedly different kind of honor, even if he is granted honor in the wake of a shameful demise. Instead, as with the novels, Jesus is portrayed having and gaining, then losing, and then regaining honor that is concerned with reputation, virtue, and modesty throughout the Gospel’s narrative arc.

If, however, we are to consider the second part of our question regarding honor and shame in Mark—*How does the Gospel of Mark shape the values of honor and shame?*—it becomes necessary to complexify the above somewhat. Jesus’s honor is resurrected from the finality of death, but with a caveat. For many characters on the story level, Jesus remains a disgraced, delegitimized, failed insurrectionist and messianic pretender. He never regains his reputation on a broad scale. The narrative discourse unquestionably vindicates Jesus, but by doing so it invites the narrative audience to join a minority of the Gospel’s characters in leaving behind the perspective of the majority.

Mark beckons its audience to recognize Jesus’s greatness, his goodness, and his faithfulness. It promotes a person of character, a person faithful to the will of God—that is, the manifestation of the kingdom of God—whose public esteem is a byproduct and not an end goal. It invites its

audience to follow this messiah, Son of Humanity, and son of God, who is as impressive as any earthly ruler, who is imparted status by, and the status of, the divine. Even so, it does this in full view of the reality that not all will recognize this Jesus for who he is. Thus, in promoting Jesus's honor, the Gospel ultimately claims that widespread fame and fanfare are not inherent qualities of honor. One's reputation matters, but only inasmuch as those doing the reputing can recognize what is truly honorable. To those who truly "see," one's virtue and modesty and certainly divine approval are what create the reputation.

To an extent, then, Mark features a shift in the public court of reputation from the general public to the divine and the insightful. In the end, the Gospel, like the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, ultimately pushes back against the notion that one's honor can be determined by the judgment of "whoever happens along" (*Ench.* 28 [White]). Epictetus argues that those who can accept their own circumstances and live their lots well will be "fit to share a banquet with the gods" (15 [White]). The implication of his advice is that those who truly understand what is honorable include (1) any who accept this particular way of thinking and (2) the divine. The Gospel likewise echoes the sentiment found in Horace's poetry:

Virtue, rejecting everything that's sordid,
Shines with unblemished honor, nor takes up office
Nor puts it down persuaded by any shift
Of the popular wing; virtue shows the way
To those who deserve to know it, disdain the crowd,
Taking its flight to heaven on scornful wings. (*Carm.* 3.2.17–24 [Ferry])

Nonetheless, in light of the Gospel's shift in the public court of reputation, it is worth repeating that the honor Jesus gained and maintained throughout most of the Gospel is not delegitimized, as if that honor were not true honor because it entailed public reputation. As previously noted, Jesus gained a strong public reputation in Mark 1–14 because of his authority, godly power, benefaction, virtue, and modesty. The fame and fanfare that surrounded him were

apropos. The Gospel's emphatic point is that Jesus's honor prevails even when that widespread fame disappears, precisely because Jesus still embodies authority, godly power, benefaction, virtue, and modesty.

The shift of the Gospel's court of reputation also does not mean that Mark is strictly countercultural in its portrayal of Jesus's honor. Yes, the Gospel pushes back against one important aspect of Roman honor: its public nature—though even on this point Mark is ambivalent, since the strategic rebuilding of Jesus's honor includes publicly respected and powerful agents. In the end, Mark may claim that Jesus's degrading crucifixion matters more as a noble act of benefaction and faithfulness than as humiliating dehumanization, thus in a sense challenging the well-established notion that crucifixion was wholly shameful.

Even on these points, however, the Gospel draws upon (or at least aligns with) certain established cultural notions of honor. For instance, Mark depicts Jesus as shifting from victim (triumphal captive) to victor in keeping with the Roman sentiment that the most extreme forms of mockery could unintentionally set one up to be praised. In portraying a shift in the court of reputation, in highlighting the staying power of virtue over fame, Mark is right in line with the message of thinkers such as Horace, who disdained popularity and lauded virtue, and of groups such as the Stoics, who themselves redefined what constituted honor, shame, and shamelessness, and in so doing complexified rather than positioned themselves outside of Roman culture. In promoting a protagonist whose public honor was devastated and only partially restored, Mark, too, is a testimony to the complexity of culture.

Postscript

Literary classics are established as such because of the impact they have on their readership, an impact which stands the test of time. If it were not for its status as sacred scripture, Mark might

have failed that test. After all, it has often been often considered to lack finesse and sophistication, especially when compared to Matthew, Luke, and John. From the standpoint of Mark's literary merits, this would be a mistake, and so perhaps we can say with some gratitude that Mark's canonization was its salvation.

Mark's tale is the classic one in which the hero has, for all practical purposes, lost yet somehow manages to prevail. It insists that, even if all one's friends jump ship, if admirers turn to enemies, and if enemies prevail in making a humiliating public spectacle of one, this does not have to be the end of the story—one's final undoing. No, Mark insists that honor can survive the deepest of humiliations, and it can do so even if much of one's fame is lost in the process. Why? Because modesty and virtue, displayed through piety and benefaction and commitment to work that is good, are what matter most. Ultimately, reputation matters too, but only inasmuch as those doing the evaluating can discern what is truly honorable. With this message, Mark inspires human hope and tenacity.

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