

we must go down into the midst of them. The Incarnation is our law, and wisdom'.⁹

- 1 Cardinal Manning, *The Dignity and Rights of Labour* (London 1934) p.v.
- 2 Manning op.cit. pp 91—92.
- 3 Maurice Couve de Murville and Philip Jenkins, *Catholic Cambridge* (London 1983) p.132
- 4 My lines on Lopes are based on the reminiscences of Professor W.L. Edge published in the 1981 *Newsletter* of the Cambridge University Catholic Chaplaincy, pp .24—7.
- 5 D.M. Prümmer, *Handbook of Moral Theology* (ET Cork 1956) p. 161.
- 6 Rodger Charles and Drostan Maclaren, *The Social Teaching of Vatican II* (Oxford 1982) concede that the analogy between justified strikes and just wars has been customary. They add that the analogy may not be taken to indicate that the Church's social teaching sees industrial relations as a cockpit of the class war (pp.326—7). Yet the language of class war is not rare in Catholic thinking on strikes. Writing in the June 1926 issue of *Blackfriars* (and the date has an obvious significance), Joseph Clayton remarked that the strike and the lock-out 'are not the causes of class struggle; they are but incidents of the struggle, evidences of conflicting interests. The roots of class war are in capitalism itself...' (p. 361).
- 7 A brief summary of the secular material is in *The Right to Strike* (CTS London 1979), more fully in Paul Sieghart, *The International Law of Human Rights* (Oxford 1983).
- 8 *Winters of Discontent*. Industrial Conflict: A Christian Perspective (London 1981).
- 9 Quoted in V.A. McClelland, *Cardinal Manning* (London 1962) p. 156.

Mark's Story of the Death of Jesus

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The four Gospel accounts of the death of Jesus might be compared to four portraits of him. Rembrandt or Velazquez would present a rather traditional and historical likeness. El Greco presents almost translucent features and elongated limbs, a more mystical likeness. Roualt, who gives perhaps no more than a torso in bold striking colors, brings out the human suffering. Dali presents a cosmic view, the cross hovering over the world. Each presents the same story but with differing emphases; the crucifixion is, at the same time, historical, traditional, mystical, full of human suffering and cosmic.

Similarly, each Evangelist has created a portrait of the death of Jesus. We must ask why. The Evangelists were not just writing biography, nor were they concerned with the purely historical. They were writing from the resurrection faith, from which stems all the theology of the New Testament. They narrate the death of Jesus from this perspective; consequently, the meaning of his death, rather than physical detail, is their central concern.

1. Two points of view

Their eastern view of narrative differs from our modern Western view.

We must recognise this difference to grasp the purpose of the Gospel narratives.

Like the nineteenth-century German exegetes, we tend to read the Gospel narratives with a primarily historical interest in *what actually* happened. The Evangelists and their Christian contemporaries, however, were more interested in the theological meaning of these facts. Their question is not so much ‘What took place?’ but rather ‘What was going on in what took place?’ Although history is important, the primary concern of the Evangelists is not that of providing historical information. They make no attempt to bring out the physical aspects of Jesus’ death; rather they underscore its significance. Blood, for example, is not mentioned in the Synoptics’ description of his death, even though the blood of the Eucharist is proposed as drink (Mk 14:23ff; Mt 26:27ff; Lk 22:20; Jn 6:53ff; 1 Cor 11:25ff).

The Evangelists employed the Old Testament to bring out the meaning of Jesus’ giving his life in freedom and love for all. The Old Testament provides the context for grasping the sacramental significance of the paschal mystery. Leviticus 17:10–16 and Deuteronomy 12:23 tell us that the life of any creature is in the blood, the *nephesh*, the flesh, the life-principle. God forbade the Israelites to drink it because he alone was to be their life-principle, their Lord. When the Evangelists speak of Jesus’ blood poured out, they are not speaking of just his physical blood, but of his life given for us. Of primary theological interest is the meaning of the blood that is shed historically. When we are asked to drink his blood we are asked to accept his life as our own.

2. *Servant of God for all*

In Mark’s view Jesus is the Servant of God. His theological perspective in Mark 10:45, “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many”, is summarized by the words ‘for many’ (*anti pollôn*). And in Mark 14:24, “This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which is to be poured out for many” (*hupér pollôn*), he makes the same point. These phrases, meaning ‘for many’, are not used elsewhere in the New Testament save in parallel texts by Matthew which directly depend on Mark (Mt 20:28 *anti pollôn* and Mt 26:28 *perì pollôn*). In the context of Semitic languages (Aramaic and Hebrew) the word ‘many’ (*rabbîm*) is not exclusive: it does not leave anyone out. It is equivalent to the English word ‘all’. Mark has preserved an ancient formula, more primitive than the Greek *pantôn* of 1 Timothy 2:6, which he attributes to Jesus and uses for his theological interpretation of the purpose of Jesus’ death. Jesus dies ‘for many’, without excluding anyone, or ‘for all’.

This is not a uniquely Marcan view. The Church has always affirmed the universal purpose of Christ’s saving death. Since Mark was the first Evangelist to record this phrase and since he preserves what is

probably the oldest expression of it, we can characterize his interpretation of the theology of the death of Jesus by his words 'for many'. This expression, and its New Testament variants 'for you', 'for sinners', 'for the just', mean that the death of Jesus has an efficacy which communicates life for all, in every place and time.

3. *The eight last moments*

How does Mark's theological narrative describe this unique death? "It was the third hour when they crucified him" (15:25); "From the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land, until the ninth hour" (15:33). In these texts there are two important elements: the duration of the crucifixion and the duration of the darkness. Mark divides the last day of Jesus' life into eight periods of three hours each, in each of which an important event is recorded.¹ For the Jews the day begins at sunset and ends at the following sunset, and in Roman times there were twelve daytime hours from sunrise to sunset, and four night watches of three hours each.

Starting with the Last Supper, Mark begins the Day of the Passion at sunset. After their Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples leave for Gethsemane. Mark tells us that it is 'night', or about 9.00 p.m. Jesus prays for an hour "Could you not watch one hour with me?" (14:37); and then two more hours until midnight, when he is arrested and taken to the high priests. Then we read that Peter continued denying him until the cock crew for the second time, or about 3.00 a.m. (The "second cock crow" was a Roman technical term for the last of the four night watches, it was about 3:00 a.m.; see Mark 13:15.) The trial of Jesus begins at sunrise (about 6.00 a.m.). He is crucified at the third hour (9.00 a.m.). At the sixth hour the darkness begins, about 12 noon, and at the ninth hour, immediately after the darkness ends, Jesus cries out and dies, about 3.00 p.m. He stays on the cross until sunset (6.00 p.m.) when he is taken down and buried. In other words, Jesus has been hanging on the cross for nine hours (9.00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.), six of those still alive. We must ask why Mark alone provides this chronological information.

Mark employs this artificial time schedule for a particular purpose, which seems to be related to a liturgical or catechetical structure in the early Church.² It probably corresponds to the way that the Church in Mark's day celebrated the important events of the Passion. Every three hours the Christian community would commemorate and teach the meaning of a particular event. Early Christians took this schedule for liturgical prayer from the Jews.

4. *The blood of the lamb*

Daily, pious Jews recited the *shema*, the prayer taken from Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God...", at sunrise and at sunset. They also prayed the psalms of praise at the same hours and at

the ninth hour (3.00 p.m.). At the time of Christ, lambs were sacrificed twice daily in the Temple, at the third hour (9.00 a.m.) and at the ninth (3.00 p.m.) Mark tells us that Jesus, the real lamb that is sacrificed for us all, was crucified when the first lamb was sacrificed in the morning (9.00 a.m.) and died when the last lamb was sacrificed in the afternoon (3.00 p.m.). These are also the times when trumpets would sound from the Temple calling the faithful to worship God in his holy sanctuary.

The gates of the Temple were opened at sunrise and closed at sunset, which correspond respectively, in Mark's narrative, to the times at which Jesus is sentenced to death and is buried.

Mark implies the saving power of Jesus' death by linking it temporally with the sacrifice of the lambs in the Temple. Mark evokes the blood-of-the-lamb symbolism of the original Passover event to communicate his theological interpretation of Jesus' death. The blood of the lambs was sprinkled on the door posts (Ex 12:13) to save the first-born sons of the Hebrews from death during the tenth plague that struck the Egyptians. Thus Mark uses the times of the Temple sacrifices to recall the time of the first Passover sacrifice. All these times, for Mark, reflect the meaning of the end-time event that is God's saving act of judgment in the death of Jesus, the real lamb.

The times for liturgical prayer in the Temple become those for prayer in the Christian community. The *hours* of the Christian breviary still correspond to the times of prayer in the Jewish liturgy.

5. *Three hours of darkness*

Mark employs the symbol of darkness, which lasts for three hours, to interpret the meaning of Jesus' death: "At the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" (15:23).

If ours is a purely historical interest, we shall miss the theological significance of Mark's narrative. Early twentieth-century commentators asked whether the darkness referred to an eclipse, a desert sand-storm, or to some other meteorological phenomenon. There is no specific answer at this level, and neither need there be; for Mark is not making a weather report. Does the darkness represent a portent or a prodigy? Again, apart from there being no similar example in other ancient literature, this is not Mark's interest.

6. *Darkness overcome*

The word that Mark uses for darkness, *skòtos*, is nowhere employed the New Testament in a purely physical sense, but always in a figurative or metaphorical sense: there are those who walk or sit in darkness, who are cast into outer darkness. Darkness also has an eschatological sense: the final day of the Lord is one of darkness. In these cases the darkness represents the state of alienation, or separation, from God. This symbolic meaning of darkness helps us to understand why Mark repeats

that “at the ninth hour” (15:33, 34); only when the darkness is over, does Jesus utter his prayer from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (15:34 = Ps 21 (22): 1). Jesus cries out in a loud voice *after* the darkness because Mark is telling us that through his death God had finally terminated the state of alienation or separation between himself and humankind. His voice is heard to utter a traditional prayer of Israel’s Temple liturgy.

Mark is telling us that God has come in a final act of saving judgment to overcome everything that darkness had traditionally symbolized in the relationship between God and humankind. Mark underscores the meaning of Jesus as the new Temple by having him utter a psalm of Israel’s traditional Temple worship *after* the three hour period of darkness. The Jewish Temple liturgy took place in the light of day, not at night in the hours of darkness! The darkness at midday is an obvious Marcan reference to eschatological sayings of Israel’s prophets concerning God’s final act of saving judgment (see Amos 8:9; Jer 15:9; Joel 3:16). God achieves his final victory over all that the darkness represents through the suffering and dying and rising of Jesus.

7. *Passover symbolism*

Three elements are especially helpful for grasping the theological meaning of Mark’s Passover symbolism of darkness: (1) no mention of the sun; (2) a three-hour period of darkness; (3) the darkness occurs before Jesus’ death.

Because Jesus dies at the time of the Jewish Passover, Mark appropriately employs Passover symbolism in his theological narrative. The darkness recalls the ninth plague which punished the Egyptians and brought nearer the liberation of the Hebrews: “The Lord said to Moses ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be a darkness over all the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt’. So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven and there was a thick darkness over all the land of Egypt for three days” (Ex 10:21–23). There are three elements of darkness in the Exodus Passover symbolism: (1) no mention of the sun; (2) it lasts for three days; (3) it is followed by the tenth plague, the death of the first-born Egyptian males (Ex 11:5).

Mark clearly evokes the saving Exodus event of divine judgment by using the same three elements in his darkness symbolism: (1) no mention of the sun; (2) it lasts for three hours; (3) it is immediately followed by the death of the first-born and beloved Son of God. (Mark parallels this with the parable of the wicked husbandmen who kill the beloved and only son, 12:1–11). Through his use of parallelism, Mark implies that just as the death of the first-born sons of the Egyptians is a divine judgment for the liberation of the Hebrews from the bondage of Egypt, so too the death of the first-born and beloved Son of God is the divine judgment for the salvation/liberation of all humankind. God’s judgment

in the tenth plague has a negative note of vengeance in it as a reprisal for the Egyptian slaughter of the Hebrew male children, from which Moses was spared (Ex 1:16). The death of Jesus, on the other hand, is a divine judgment for the salvation of all.

8. *Plague symbolism*

Mark employs the biblical sign value of the plague as an act of divine judgment. These acts can have both a negative and a positive aspect. One may be judged guilty or innocent; one may be condemned or saved. The condemnation of the guilty may also be for the salvation of the innocent. His acts of judgment in all ten plagues are for the liberation of the Hebrews (Ex 6:6; 7:4). All these great acts of judgment are described as signs which God performs, “to let you know that I am Yahweh” (Ex 10:2). For the Hebrews, God reveals himself most clearly in what he *does*.

Jesus’ death, in Mark’s narrative, is such a sign of saving judgment to let all know that he is the Son of God. Mark’s literary symbolism implies that we must interpret Jesus’ death in terms of the deepest meaning of the Exodus event of which it is the ultimate fulfillment. This event is at the basis of both Old and New Testament theologizing. In answer to the question “Who is Yahweh, God?”, the Jews would not answer “The Supreme Being” or “The Ultimate Reality”; rather they would answer that “He is the One who brought us out of the land of Egypt into the Promised Land”. They knew their God concretely in their experience of His great act of saving judgment. Similarly, Mark is the spokesman for the community of Christians who know their God as the Father of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in their experience of His great act of saving judgment in the death of Jesus. Mark employs the symbolism of God’s saving judgment in the original Passover, or Exodus, event to express the meaning of His judgment in the death of Jesus.

9. *Crying out with a loud voice*

After the darkness ends, Jesus utters his last words, crying out with a loud voice: “My God, my God why have you abandoned me?” (15:34). These words are extraordinary on two counts. It is the only time in the New Testament that Jesus prays without invoking God as Father and quotes Scripture (Ps 21(22):2) in his prayers, even though he frequently quotes Scripture elsewhere.

What does Mark want us to understand by the final words that he ascribes to Jesus? Doubtless, they express extreme suffering and anguish, feelings of utter desolation and dereliction; but still his prayer from Scripture implies that he is at one with the will of his Father before death. Were these words of despair, they could have hardly engendered the confession of faith of the centurion who witnessed the way he died! His

dying, in both *word* and deed, leads the centurion to confess that Jesus is the Son of God! God has not chosen to let this “hour” pass nor has he chosen to remove this cup (see 14:35—36); rather, God allows Jesus to be delivered into the hands of his enemies. Paul affirms (Rm 8:32) that God delivered up his own Son for us all, and Peter (1 Pt 3:18) says that this was the “Just One” dying for the “unjust ones”. Mark expresses in Jesus’ last words the suffering of the Just One, the sufferer in Pss 21/22 and 68/69, who fully experiences what it means to be delivered up by God for the salvation of all. Jesus willingly accepts this suffering as the servant of God in the service of all. His intense pain of utter abandonment expresses the price that he has willingly paid in self-abandonment to his Father’s will for the salvation of all.

Mark’s theology is that of the early Christian tradition which affirms that Jesus willingly has been “delivered up” both by himself (Eph 5:2, 25) and by the Father (Rm 8:32). He is willingly the servant of God. He fully entrusts himself to God in his service on behalf of all, recalling the Servant of God in Isaiah who was delivered up for our salvation (Is 11 and 12).

10. *Psalm of the Just One*

The psalm which Jesus utters expresses the suffering and hope of the just man in his total commitment to God. It is the prayer of the afternoon sacrifice in the Temple, which is now uttered by the true Lamb at the moment of his free and complete self-sacrifice or self-giving for all. The blood of the Lamb is poured out to become the life-principle for all. Jesus achieves God’s salvation for all, dying with a prayer on his lips that excludes any question of despair. The signs that follow his prayer indicate that he has not been abandoned. His prayer is that of the just, innocent, faithful Servant of God. Mark implies that his is service which he alone can perform by portraying Jesus dying alone with none of his friends near him. With dramatic irony, at the moment that Jesus gives his life for all, he is apparently abandoned by all.

The last words of Jesus express Mark’s theological commentary on his death. Mark intends us to recall the entire psalm. Reciting the first verse of a psalm in the Temple liturgy and in the Passover rites was an invitation to join in the recitation of the entire psalm. Mark intends us to understand that the meaning of the psalm as a whole is fulfilled in Jesus. The great eschatological triumph of God in Jesus is, for Mark, the ultimate meaning or fulfillment of the sense of triumph expressed by the suffering just man of the psalm.

11. *The torn veil*

Between the account of Jesus’ death (15:37) and the confession made by the centurion upon witnessing Jesus’ death (15:39), Mark reports the rending of the Temple veil (15:38). Mark employs the rending of the

Temple veil, no less than Psalm 21/22, to interpret the meaning of the cross. With the rending of the Temple veil, the theme of Jesus replacing the Temple as the true locus of the divine presence is completed. The author of Hebrews understands this tradition in the same way when he interprets the story in terms of the Christian worship of Jesus Christ in whom we have direct access to the true Holy of Holies, the presence of God himself (Heb 10:19–20).

In Mark's mind, the death of Jesus is a divine judgment. The God whose "face" or "presence" was veiled within the "Holy of Holies" (Ex 33:11, 14) himself rips away the veil and shows his "face" and manifests his "presence" in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark draws out metaphorically the self-revelatory efficacy of God's act of saving judgment in the self-oblation of Jesus. Through his death, which culminates his mission of suffering and service, Jesus' true identity is manifested; and the effect, according to Mark, is that of God himself showing his "face" in that of the Son of God, recognized as such by the centurion. Mark employs symbols of Jewish Temple worship, the psalm and the Temple veil, to express the meaning of Jesus and his death.

Mark, thus, resolves the two chief preoccupations of the narrative: (1) Jesus' rejection and suffering, which culminates with his death (15:37), and (2) the revelation and recognition of Jesus' identity, which culminates with the centurion's confession (15:39). On the presupposition that these two preoccupations may be viewed as the central driving forces of Mark's narrative, the literary and theological symbolism of the torn veil is of major significance; for we assume that the Gospel is a literary-theological whole. The interpretation of a particular passage turns primarily on our examination of the way that it functions in the structure of the whole, the way it picks up or develops the motifs and themes that characterize the remainder of the Gospel, the way it makes use of distinctive words, phrases, appellations, actions and characters.

12. The Temple motif

Mark forges a theological interpretation of Jesus' death in terms of symbols central to Jewish worship. The theme of Jesus' death is closely interwoven with the Temple motif from the moment of his entry into Jerusalem where his Passion will be consummated (10:32–34). Jesus cleanses the Temple (11:15–19). He scorns those who keep it (12:12–27, 38–40). He predicts its ultimate destruction (13:1–2). The two charges at his trial (14:58, 61), the twofold mockery beneath the cross (15:29, 32), and the two reported consequences of his death (15:38, 39) evidence the vital connection between Mark's christological interests and his literary-theological use of the Temple motif to affirm that Jesus is the suffering Servant of God who will build the eschatological temple "not made with hands" (14:58).

Temple destruction and rebuilding is a Marcan metaphor for Jesus'

rejection (14:58), suffering (15:29), death (15:38), and resurrection. The crucified and risen Christ is, for Mark, the true Temple, the true center of the divine presence and worship; consequently, right worship for all humankind is redefined as taking up the cross and following him in total commitment to God in the service of all.

13. *A new meaning for the sacred*

Mark reinterprets the traditional Jewish notion of the sacred through his use of the Temple motif. The radicalness of this reinterpretation is the motive for having Jesus condemned to death. That Jesus becomes in himself the Temple's replacement is the point of the accusation at his trial: "We heard him say 'I am going to destroy this Temple made by human hands and in three days build another, not made with hands'" (14:58). The holiness of the Temple was linked with the notion of separateness, based on the belief that God is the most holy and the most separate. The holiness of his dwelling place, the Temple, therefore required separateness. Similarly, the holiness of the Holy Land and the Holy City separated them, respectively, from all other lands and cities. Even the Temple, a huge edifice covering a fifth of the whole area of Jerusalem, was constructed and divided into many sections on the basis of the degrees of separateness between God and humankind. The Gentiles could enter the outer court of the Temple, because they too were creatures of God who, not following the Law, were not as holy as the Jews who could enter into the inner court, a more holy and separate place. Jewish men, as opposed to women, could go one stage further, to the court of Israel. Beyond this, to the Holy Place, the Temple proper, only priests could go. (Jesus, a layman, could not enter this section. He was not a Jewish priest of Israel; his priesthood stems from his death and resurrection. The letter to the Hebrews describes his as a different priesthood, according to the order of Melchizedek.) And in their turn, only one priest at a time could approach the Holy of Holies to offer incense (Lk 1:9). Physical barriers, walls, doors and the veil, represented the stages of holiness in the Temple. The Holy of Holies was inside the priests' court, screened off by the great Temple veil, behind which God dwelt in glory and the holiest treasures of Judaism were kept: the Ark of the Covenant, the manna from the desert, the staff of Aaron (1 Kgs 8:6). Although all these disappeared at the time of the destruction of the Temple and the exile (2 Ch 36:18), the Holy of Holies, in the rebuilt Temple, was still considered to be as holy as ever. This inner sanctuary was entered only once a year, at *Yom Kippur*, by the High Priest (1 Kgs 8:10), who filled the place with incense to maintain the separation between himself and God.

14. *Breaking the barriers*

All these barriers show us just how electrifying Mark's statement is that

at the death of Jesus the Temple veil of separation was torn asunder. Through the symbolism of the torn veil, Mark tells us that God has performed an act of destructive and saving judgment. Through the self-oblation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, at Golgotha God has destroyed all the barriers and separations between Himself and humankind; He has also created a direct access to Himself for all humankind in Jesus Christ, His Son, the Beloved (1:11; 9:7).

15. "I am"

Mark records three 'I am' (*ego eimi*) statements in which Jesus identifies himself in the same way that God identifies Himself to Moses in the theophany at the burning bush (Ex 3:6).

Only God and his divine Son can say 'I am' with authority. Jesus warns his disciples that others will attempt to arrogate this divine title to themselves (13:5—6). There are only two other times that Jesus identifies himself with this title in Mark's narrative: whilst walking on the sea (6:50) and before the High Priest (14:62).

16. A house for all the nations

There is evidence that the Messiah will destroy his enemies, will conquer evil by the breath of his mouth (confer Is 11:4; 4 Ezra 13:4; Ethiopian Enoch 62:2). This evidence may help to explain the curious description which Mark gives of Jesus' death. A crucified man would be so weak that he would die with hardly a groan, let alone a loud cry: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the veil of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus *breathed his last*, he said, 'Truly, this man was the Son of God!'" (15:37—39).

The centurion's confession of Jesus as the Son of God makes clear that Jesus' death provides entry for all into the sanctuary: all can draw near to God through and in the Son of God. The Temple veil no longer hides God's glory. This glory is seen in the Crucified, who has established a new people in fulfillment of the prophecy: "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*" (11:17). He has poured out his life for all (14:24), the life which forms the new Temple and its people.

To ask whether the Temple veil was really torn asunder would be to miss Mark's point. The torn veil symbolizes the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new. A new ritual and cult and Temple replace the old. The meaning of the new beginning is linked to Mark's word for describing the rending of the veil (*eschisthê* = "was rent"). The only other place where Mark uses the verb is in recounting the baptism of Jesus: "...he saw the heavens being rent (*schizoménous*) and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him" (1:10). The heavens are envisioned as a cloth or veil torn asunder to allow the Spirit to descend and the "voice

from heaven” to be experienced or heard affirming, “You are my Son, the Beloved” (1:11). Jesus, mission as the Servant of God originates in his experience and possession of the Spirit of God. His mission is completed by his communication of this same Spirit that will enable all others to share his life, poured out for all (14:24), and to hear that same voice which identifies him as the beloved Son of God. His God-given mission and service for all is to communicate the loving presence of the Spirit, that all might fully share his life as beloved children of God.

17. *The centurion: voice of faith*

Thus, Mark’s story closes as it opened, with the words acclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. God’s announcement of Jesus as his Son in the voice from heaven (1:11) is acknowledged, significantly, by a gentle Roman centurion (15:39), the first human person in Mark’s narrative to make the full Christian confession of faith: Jesus is the Son of God. That the first Christian confession of faith should come from a gentile symbolizes the efficacy and universal scope of the Servant who gives his life for all. He represents all who make the same Christian confession of faith in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit of God which his total commitment to God at Golgotha has revealed and communicated. Mark is interested in the individual gentile centurion only as representing all those who are saved by the death of Jesus and his communicating the Spirit of God. For Mark he is the spokesman for the Christian faith and for the gentiles who are called by God to join the Jews as the people of God. To ask whether an individual Roman centurion had historically made such a full affirmation of Christian faith would be to miss the point. Only through the death of Jesus can anyone acknowledge that he is the Son of God.

Mark implies that only through the gift of the Spirit of God can anyone fully recognize and accept the Son of God. In the account of Jesus’ baptism, Mark links Jesus’ possession of the Spirit of God with his self-knowledge, vocation and mission as the Son of God, the Beloved. The divine voice that Jesus hears at his baptism, which inaugurates his mission as the Servant of God (1:11), quotes from the coronation Psalm (Ps 2:7) which Mark intends as an announcement of who Jesus is and how he will function as God’s obedient Son, to which the centurion’s affirmation is the appropriate response. Mark also quotes from Deutero-Isaiah’s reference to his ordination as a prophet (Is 42:1). God has given his Servant his Spirit that he might bring his righteousness to all. Mark relates that Jesus “*breathed his last*” (15:36) with the implication that he has completed his God-given mission with his communication of the Spirit of God that had inaugurated it. If we recall that the root meaning of ‘spirit’ is ‘breath’ and by extension the life principle of the living, then Mark’s gentile centurion would represent all those who have accepted the Spirit of God as the new life principle which

Jesus has 'breathed' into them in his total self-commitment on Golgotha.

Only those who have accepted the Spirit as their own life principle can truly recognize and confess Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. In recounting Jesus' constant repudiation of the apparently true confessions of demons and demoniacs, Mark might well be implying that Christians who confess Jesus with their tongues but have no love for him in their hearts are—being devoid of the Spirit of God—really no different from the devils in their meaningless affirmations that he is their Lord, their Beloved, the Son of their God!

18. *Mission completed*

The High Priest's circumlocution for the Godhead ('Son of the Blessed') and the charge of blasphemy (cf. 2:7) both indicate that Mark considers Jesus' divinity to be the real bone of contention at his trial. At the very beginning of the narrative, Jesus is identified as the "Christ, Son of God" (1:1). At the two christophanic episodes of the baptism (1:11) and the Transfiguration (9:7), the voice of God is heard identifying Jesus as "My Son, the Beloved". Mark balances the baptismal scene (in which Jesus alone hears that voice) with the scene at Golgotha. Jesus' mission, as Servant of God, is inaugurated at his baptism and completed through his filial self-surrender to God on the cross when the centurion declares that Jesus is "the Son of God". Both the heavens rent at the baptism and the Temple veil rent at the death of Jesus allow direct communication with God for the true identification of Jesus as Christ, son of God, the Beloved.

Mark underscores the link between these two scenes with the Transfiguration episode which occurs six days after Jesus' first formal announcement of his coming passion and death (8:31; 9:2—7), when the voice of God is again heard identifying Jesus as "My Son, the Beloved" (9:7). The centurion's confession that Jesus is "the Son of God" parallels the voice of God at the baptism and the Transfiguration. Mark makes the centurion the symbol of all who make the full Christian confession of belief in the divine sonship of Jesus and benefit from the saving effect of God's judgment.

19. *The cross reveals*

The torn veil and the centurion's confession are the two signs following Jesus' death that contextualize the meaning of Jesus' shout "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" God did not, indeed, abandon his Son who was on the Cross in fulfillment of God's will for the salvation of all humankind. Jesus' final prayer expresses both the cost and the incomparable benefits of total self-abandonment to God. Nothing in all creation, not even death itself, separates the Son of God, the Beloved, from his Father. His final prayer brings to completion his prayer at Gethsemane: "Not my will, but thine be done" (14:36). In the

apocalyptic language of Psalm 21/22 Jesus expresses an entire life and death based on the absolute trustworthiness of God and utter confidence in the coming of his kingdom.

For Mark the cross is the chief locus of revelation. There, Jesus gives himself totally to the Father in freedom and love. The Father is the Supreme Good of all. Thus, the cross is the place where Jesus Christ fulfills his service for all mankind. It is the place where he is recognised as the Son of God; and it is in a similar way that his disciples will be known.

1 <i>Text time</i>	<i>Modern time</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Ref</i>
(Thursday) <i>evening</i> (after sunset)	1800	Prediction about Judas the Last Supper	14:17
<i>night</i>	2100	Prediction about Peter Gethsemane	14:30
(Friday) <i>after three hours</i> (first cockcrow)	2400	Arrest of Jesus interrogation begins	14:37- 41
<i>second cockcrow</i>	0300	Peter's first denial	14:68
<i>early morning</i>	0600	Peter's last denials	14:72
<i>third hour</i>	0900	Trial before Pilate	15:1
<i>sixth hour</i>	1200	Crucifixion	15:25
<i>ninth hour</i>	1500	Darkness begins	15:33
<i>evening</i> (before sunset)	1800	Darkness ends death of Jesus Burial of Jesus	15:34- 37 15:42

2 It is similar to his parable on watching (Mk 13:33—37), and Matthew's of the landowner going out into the market square every three hours to hire laborers (Mt 20:1—6).