

Chapter Five: Christ High Priest: Christology and Soteriology

In this final chapter, we shall engage in a Christological exploration of the gospel of Mark, repeating as may be fitting what we have already seen, but seeking also to go beyond this in our understanding of who Christ is in this gospel.

Jesus, the eschatological priest. We have seen that the Testament of Levi, in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (TestLevi 18:12), says that the “new priest” shall bind Beliar (the “devil” in Jesus’ time).⁸⁴ Jesus in Mark 1:24 is called the “Holy One of God” by the unclean spirit(s) who cry out that he has come to destroy them. “Holy One of God” may be a priestly title; thus is Aaron called in Psa 106:16.⁸⁵ In Mark 3:22-30, there is a discussion between the scribes who come from Jerusalem and Jesus, whom they have accused of casting out demons by means of the prince of demons. Jesus replies that if Satan is divided in this way, his kingdom can no longer stand, and, in order to illustrate what he is saying, he uses the image of the man who can bind the strong one and thus ransack his house (as Jesus has done with Satan; cf. 2 Cor 6:15; Luke 10:17-18). The theme of Jesus as the “strong(er) one” had already been announced by the Baptist, Mark 1:7. In Mark 5:1-20, we have the culmination of the exorcism accounts, where the *crescendo* grows to its most dramatic climax (cf. Mark 1:23-24; 3:11). Here, the conglomerate called “Legion” (some have here seen references to the Roman empire, who indeed was the final “beast” for the Qumranites, as it is in the Book of Revelation), even from afar, runs and falls prostrate a Jesus’ feet, crying “with a loud voice” that Jesus is the Son of God Most High.⁸⁶ No one could tame this imperial beast, not even with chains, Mark 5:3-4. The Greek verb translated “could” (like the Spanish verb *poder*) means “be strong;” we could here translate “and there was no one being strong (enough

⁸⁴ The date of the Testaments is placed in the Maccabean period, except for the Christian interpolations, which could be from the early second century; see *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Vol. I, 777-778*.

⁸⁵ JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I. A Commentary* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 79, says that “the Great Holy One” (in Aramaic *qdyš rb*) in 1QapGen 2:14, is a title of God which is also found in 1 Enoch 98:6 (in the Epistle of Enoch, dated by VanderKam to ca. 170 B.C.E.). He adds that the roots of this title are found in the Old Testament (Ezra 5:8; Dan 2:45). We could also cite, in the Book of Isaiah, Isa 12:6.

⁸⁶ There may be here a subtle reference to Melchizedek, called priest of God Most High in Gen 14:18-20. We saw that Heb 7 explains Jesus’ priesthood by referring to Melchizedek in Gen 14. The Qumran document 11QMelchizedek refers often to the spirits of Belial (variant of Beliar) who shall be vanquished by Melchizedek on the final Yom Kippur of the tenth Jubilee, the last one.

so as) to tame him.” The reader knows, or will soon see, that Jesus *is* strong enough. It is a dramatic presentation of Jesus as the Strong One who binds the Evil One, something which can be understood in the light of priestly concepts which are not developed or made explicit in Mark.⁸⁷

The divine presence as the goal of the Exodus. Clearly, the presence of God was for Israel something essential to its existence. Especially in the Priestly tradition, when God went away, due to the uncleanness of his people, and perhaps even more the uncleanness of the Land and of the temple in particular, what prevailed was chaos, something like a return to “un-creation” (as in the threats in Jer 4:23; Zeph 1:2-3). The Land actually purged itself of this indigestible contamination, Lev 18:24-25; this was the “automatic” reason for Exile, according to the great scholar Jacob Milgrom. And we have already seen that in Ezekiel, due to the sins of the people and the contamination they brought especially to the temple, Yahweh God left the temple gradually (by degrees), until it was destroyed. According to Milgrom, paradoxically, what most attracted (like a magnet) contamination, which he calls *miasma* (the Greek word for pollution), was the Holy of Holies, the very presence of Yahweh (especially above the cover—in Hebrew *kappôret*, in the Greek *LXX hilastērion*—of the Ark; see Num 7:89, which indicates the place where God was when Moses went in to speak with him; cf. Exod 25:22; Lev 16:2). The word *kappôret* is sometimes translated “mercy-seat” or “propitiatory” or “place of expiation;” Milgrom does not think it can be translated. It was this cover that was sprinkled with blood once a year on the great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, Lev 16:14-16. This took place once a year, year after year (as the Epistle to the Hebrews does not tire of reminding us), but it was then that even deliberate sins were blotted out (or “expiated”), even the worst sins, according to Milgrom. These were the *peša’im*, “crimes, transgressions, rebellions,” Lev 16:16 (a verse we can consider the epicenter of the

⁸⁷ Interestingly, Jesus sends Legion to a great herd of pigs, some two thousand (a Roman legion numbered some five thousand soldiers). Pigs are by antonomasia idolatrous uncleanness; it was the sacrifice of a pig on the altar of the temple which was called the “abomination of the desolation” in the Maccabean period; see 1 Macc 1:54; 6:7; Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; cf. Mark 13:14. RICHARD A. HORSLEY, in his commentary to Mark 5:1-20 in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Third Edition, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (Michael D. Coogan, ed.; Oxford – New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 65 NEW TESTAMENT, establishes a link between destruction by means of the Sea here in Mark 5 and in Exod 15:4, and also with Mark 11:23, where he thinks that “this mountain” refers to the temple. Cf. Rev 15. Rikki Watts (*Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*) connects the “strong man” theme in Mark to that of the divine warrior so important in the Old Testament.

Pentateuch, since Leviticus is its central book, and many see in chapter 16 the center of the center, all this having been designed by the Priestly editors of the Torah). Now, these “crimes” are exactly what the Servant took up for sinners, Isa 53:5, 8, just as he was numbered among “criminals or transgressors,” 53:12, “lifting up the sin (Hebrew *hāēl*) of “many.”

Let us recall that the Servant “shall sprinkle” (an expression which has caused perplexity from the time of the LXX, which translated “shall startle”) “many nations,” Isa 52:15; we should retain the Hebrew verb just as it is. It is the same verb “to sprinkle, spatter” in Lev 16:14-15 (but not the verb used in Ezek 36:25, for a perhaps more abundant “splashing”). Given the expiatory, cultic functions of the Suffering Servant of Isa 52-53, and taking into account the type of exegesis practised by the Qumranites which we briefly saw, we can very well see an allusion to the purification of the sanctuary, of the Holy of Holies, in Isa 52:15. Thus did Heb 9 see it. And thus may we interpret what Paul states in Rom 3:25, where he says that God “put forward” Jesus as *hilastērion*, that is, as the same place (the cover of the Ark) where expiation took place on Yom Kippur.

But let us return to the topic of the goal of the Exodus. It is the end of Exile, understood as a state or condition of sin, of non-redemption, of absence of God and of his blessings, to the point of being outside the covenant, before the time of the new covenant which is necessary for salvation, which implies the forgiveness of sins, Jer 31:31-34; cf. Heb 10:11-25. And what this new condition—which is a new creation, as in Ezek 37—brings is coming to truly be the people of God; see Jer 32:36-41; Ezek 37:20-8. It is the sum of all good things: the reunification of the twelve tribes (which implies the end of all exiles, the definitive return to home and family of the Jubilee, Lev 25:10). But most important of all, and what guarantees definitive wellbeing, is the divine presence; this is what the final chapters of the great priest Ezekiel, 40-48, so beautifully illustrate: they have to do with the new temple, and its healing waters and abundance of fish and fruits; in short, the return to the paradisiacal state (see already Ezek 36:35 and Lev 26:11-12, which Milgrom considers a promise that Yahweh will again take strolls with his people as he did in Gen 3:8). This is why the Book of Ezekiel ends with the announcement of the new name of the holy city Jerusalem (in Hebrew, *Yērušalāim*): *Yēwašammah* (“Yahweh is there”).

Already from Exod 15:17-18 —the famous “song of Moses” after the victory of Yahweh which freed Israel from Egypt— the temple (the divine presence) was spoken of as the goal of the Exodus. The reference is to the holy mountain (Zion), where Yahweh dwells, and to the sanctuary of Adonay (“the, or my, Lord”), which God’s hands established. This is in parallelism with God’s everlasting kingdom. The Qumranites have a *pešer* —one of their peculiar biblical interpretations, which combine diverse passages in order to give them an eschatological interpretation, which they apply to themselves as the protagonists of the last days, as does Paul in 1 Cor 9:9-10; 10:6, or even Jesus, Luke 4:21; 24:44— called precisely by scholars “florilegium” (something like a bouquet of different flowers), which speaks of this passage from the Book of Exodus. It is 4QFlorilegium (4Q174). The fragments which we have begin by speaking of the peace which there will be “at the end of the days,” a peace described in the terms of 2 Sam 7, the famous messianic prophecy of Nathan to David promising him a perpetual dynasty and a father-son relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic descendant. But the author of the *pešer* says that this prophecy refers to the eschatological House (temple), and cites Exod 15:17-18! In fact, 2 Sam 7 begins with David’s desire to build Yahweh a House, except that Yahweh says that it is he himself who will build David a “house” (a dynasty). The *pešer* then seems to use the anti-foreigner language of Ezek 44:4-9 (regarding the eschatological temple; cf. Deut 23:2-9), to go on to speak of a “sanctuary of Adam,” or “temple of men,” in which will be offered works of Torah instead of sacrifices (this situation, according to the Israelite scholar Devorah Dimant is provisional; it will last until the new eschatological temple not built by human hands comes, in accordance with Exod 15:17; in the meantime, the Qumranites did not go to the corrupt Herodian temple).⁸⁸ Our *pešer* continues with more references to 2 Sam 7, in order to interpret the language regarding ‘father and son’ in that passage as a reference to the Messiah, called the “Sprout” (sometimes not too-happily translated “Branch;” in Hebrew it is *ts^emah*□). This important term (it is the same root which indicates the vegetable

⁸⁸ It has also been noted that in Ezek 40-48 there is no command to build the eschatological temple, as occurred with the first temple, in Exod 25:8-9, 40; 26:30. It is important to note that, when the sanctuary is built and Yahweh can then dwell in it, in Exod 40:33-35, it is like a new creation, as indicated by the Priestly date in Exod 40:1; that is, it is the first day of the first month, or New Year’s Day, as in the beginning of creation in Gen and in the “new creation” in Gen 9 (the flood ended on New Year’s Day, Gen 8:13).

growth which comes out of the ground, as in Isa 55:10, applied to the Word of God) refers to the Messiah in Jer 23:5; 33:15 and in Zech 3:8; 6:12; cf. Isa 11:1, on the famous “shoot and stump” of Jesse (terms other than *ts^emah* are used here) upon which Yahweh’s Spirit shall rest. Then the *pešer* goes on to understand the “building” of the Davidic dynasty which Yahweh will do in 2 Sam 7 in terms of Amos 9:11, an eschatological addition to the book of that prophet which speaks of abundance of wine (as in Gen 49:8-12, Jacob’s blessing of Judah), return of exiles and marvelous harvests (as in the great messianic Psa 72).⁸⁹ The *pešer* seems to associate the coming of the Messiah both with the salvation of Israel and with the new eschatological temple. This first column of the *pešer* ends with a reference to the Anointed One of Psa 2, again applied to “the last days.”⁹⁰

Jesus as the Lord who enters the temple. The gospel of Mark begins with a citation of Mal 3, although only (Deutero-)Isaiah is explicitly mentioned (in order to make clear that the topic of New Exodus/New Creation will be very important in this gospel; this is the thesis of Rikki Watts). This means that the last prophet of the Hebrew Bible, which speaks of final salvation, presents the final events as a coming of the Lord (not explicitly “Yahweh,” but *ha-adôn*, “the Lord”) to his temple; it seems that this individual is also the desired “angel (or ‘messenger’) of the covenant” (we are reminded of Isa 42:6; 49:6, 8; 55:3).⁹¹ He shall come to cleanse the Levites (the author of Malachi has been identified with Levitical and deuteronomic [“pre-Pharisaic”] circles, and not with the Zadokites [“pre-Sadducees”]), so that they may present an offering (or tribute, for the Land, see footnote 81 above) “with righteousness” (in Hebrew, *mînh^eah bîtsdaqah*). This latter Hebrew term, *ts^edaqah*, is the “justification” of Abraham in Gen 15:6 (and of the “just one” in Hab 2:4), and comes from the root of the verb applied to the Servant in Isa 53:11 (cf. Rom 3:21-26); it is a root which refers to the declaration of someone as innocent, not-guilty, “justified” (declared just or righteous) in trial or judgment, and is thus synonymous with “salvation” (see Isa 54:17; *La Bible de Jérusalem*

⁸⁹ This passage in Amos was quoted in the “Council of Jerusalem,” Acts 15:13-21, as text to justify to inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church.

⁹⁰ See the similar use of Psa 2 (the nations against Yahweh and his Anointed, his son, verse 7) in Acts 4:23-31.

⁹¹ Cf. Zech 9:9-11.

translates *ts^edaqah* here as “victoire,” victory, but, better, see the parallelism in Isa 56:1, “my salvation” [*y^ešū ‘atī*], “my righteousness” [*tsīdqatī*]; cf. Rom 10:9-10).

Now, this “angel” of Mal 3:1 is also the angel of the Exodus, Exod 23:20. This verse speaks of “the *place* which I have prepared for you.” “Place” (*maqôm*) is often another name for the temple, and it has thus been seen here; see, e.g., Deut 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2; Jer 7:3; John 11:48; Acts 6:13. Malachi is then speaking of the Final Exodus, the one announced by John the Baptist dressed as Elijah (Mal 3:23; LXX 4:5) in the context of Second Isaiah’s New Exodus, Isa 40:1-11. This is the “Good News” (cf. Luke 3:18).

We can then consider that the last prophetic message, that of Malachi, taken up by Mark 1:1-8, concerns final salvation understood as the Final Exodus and Coming of the Lord to his temple (with reference to a covenant that can be no other than that of Jer 31:31-34; 32:36-41; Ezek 34:23-31; 37:20-28).⁹² This will make possible the “pleasing offering” to God, ‘as in days of old’, Mal 3:4. It is a new situation, promised and awaited from of old, in which God will indeed make his Dwelling with his people for ever.

But we have seen that there is no “return to the Land” (= end of “Exile,” forgiveness and justification, salvation) without a new, circumcised heart (Deut 30:1-14; cf. Ezek 36:24-29). This is the final purification as a condition to final salvation, seen as a return to Paradise (Ezek 36:35). It is the forgiveness and “lifting up” of sins, the justification, which the Servant of Second Isaiah brings, Isa 53:4-7, 10-12. And this Servant “shall sprinkle” many —with his blood, we could surmise— according to Mark 14:24 (and 10:45). The thinking of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes sense: this blood of Jesus sprinkled the “cover” of the Ark, Heb 9:11-14; 12:24, that is, Christ presented himself before God with his own blood, on “Yom Kippur,” Heb 13:11-14 (Christ suffered outside the camp, like the scapegoat of Lev 16:27). This “Yom Kippur” is the eschatological day of forgiveness, that of the final Jubilee, of the final “liberation” (Hebrew *d^erôr*) of in Isa 61:1-2 (see Lev 25:8-10). This explains, or makes more explicit, what Mark presents in very brief terms. But all these topics are, one way or another, found in Mark’s gospel, all intertwined. Now, the “temple,” or the “Holy of Holies,” is nothing other than the very presence of God. To be there (cf. Heb 10:19-25) is salvation,

⁹² The “Coming One,” or “one who is to come,” is an eschatological-messianic expectation; see Matt 3:11; 11:13; 21:9; 23:39; John 1:15, 27; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27, etc.

or a sure pledge of salvation, all we can hope for in this life, until we see God face to face. This is what Christ, the Son of God, accomplished with his sacrifice. We can say that this is the meaning of the “new temple not built by human hands,” and raised in three days, of Mark 14:58; 15:29.

Christ as eschatological priest in Mark. In Mark 1:21-28, the evangelist presents Jesus as someone who teaches with “authority, dominion.” It is also declared from the beginning that he has come to destroy evil, or perhaps more exactly, *impurity*, precisely what distanced one from God in Judaism (as in so many other cultures; see the work of former Oxford anthropologist Mary Douglas); cf. Zech 13:1-2. The demoniac calls Jesus the “Holy One of God,” probably a priestly title.⁹³ Then this exorcism (which is tantamount to the defeat of evil) is defined as “a new teaching according to *exousía*.” Now, “teaching” is the meaning of “Torah” (= priestly teaching), all of it geared to maintaining the presence of God among his people, in order to avoid the chaos (due to divine absence) brought by impurity. Faults in this sense are reproached by Ez 22:23-31 (with the eschatological counterpart in 44:15-23) and Mal 2:1-9.

In Mark 1:40-45, Jesus heals a leper, something only God could do. Jesus’ command—that the healed leper go to the temple to offer the prescribed sacrifice, which the healed leper disregards, in order to start preaching about Jesus instead—has the Jewish priests in view: they could not heal leprosy, but only verify (Lev 14:1-4, 7, 36, 44, 48, 54-57) that, somehow, the afflicted person had been “cured” (“leprosy” denoted various skin conditions; even houses could suffer from this type of “leprosy”). Jesus’ command to the ex-leper in Mark 1:44 was meant to be a testimony (or witness) *against* these priests (*eis* should be translated *against*, as in Mark 6:11; 13:9). It can be said that the reader is left with the same question as the disciples in Mark 4:41, after Jesus (like

⁹³ Given Jesus’ offering of himself as priest in the Fourth Gospel (see John 10:36; Jesus offers himself in John 17), it is not difficult to interpret “Holy One of God” as a priestly term in the eucharistic discourse John 6:69. Furthermore, in John 10:36, the expression “has sanctified” in Greek is the same one applied in LXX Num 7:1 to God’s Holy Dwelling, which is also anointed. The high point of the Book of Exodus (chapter 40), for the Priestly writer, is the erection of the “Dwelling of the Tent of Meeting,” where the Divine Presence dwells (cf. John 1:14, literally, “and the Word became flesh and put his tent among us;” “put his tent” in Greek is one word, *eskēnōsen*, which evokes the three Hebrew consonants *š k n*, which are the root of the verb “to dwell, encamp, pitch a tent,” which in turn gives rise to the term *šekīnah*, the Divine Presence in rabbinic literature. In Exod 40:9-10, the Dwelling is anointed and sanctified (or consecrated), as is the altar. The altar is likewise sanctified in 1 Macc 4:48, after the cleansing of the temple which had been defiled, which we alluded to above. The language in John draws a contrast between Jesus the Anointed and Sanctified One and the altar which must be destroyed and replaced; see John 2:19-22.

Yahweh in Isa 51:9-11) had rebuked the tempestuous sea with the same command he used against the demoniac, Mark 1:25; 4:39: “Who is this whom even the wind and sea obey?” Note also the presence of “obey” in Mark 1:27; 4:41. And in the background to the pericope of the leper stands 2 Kgs 5:6-7, where the king of Israel says that only God can cure a person of leprosy.

In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus “restores” a paralytic at the same time that he forgives his sins. Again, the idea comes up that “only God can forgive sins,” Mark 2:7. Some of the scribes “dialogue” (literally) in their hearts against Jesus, accusing him of “blasphemy.” It is the same accusation which will be leveled in Mark 14:64, after Jesus has admitted to the high priest and to the whole Sanhedrin that he is the Messiah, but also the “Son of man” with the prerogatives of Psa 110: he is Lord (even of David, cf. Mark 12:35-37), he shall sit at the right hand of God and will come with the clouds (cf. Mark 13:26) as the Son of man. As the Son of man, Jesus has *exousía* (“dominion, power, authority”) to forgive sins upon the earth (an expression which is reminiscent of God in Daniel, and of the one to whom God will give such *exousía*), Mark 2:10. This scene is also linked to the temple act, for, as we saw, after that action the leaders (now said to be “the high priests, the scribes and the elders,” i.e., all the Jewish leaders) asked Jesus with what *exousía* he had acted, and who had given him such *exousía*, and when Jesus harked back to the beginning of the time of salvation, to the activity of John the Baptist, again the leaders are said to “dialogue” among themselves (same Greek verb as in Mark 2:6). So that the pardoning of the paralytic is related to Jesus’ efficaciousness (because he has *exousía*) which makes the temple and its sacrificial system obsolete. It is the same efficacy manifested in the restoration of the paralytic, as occurred with the leper, and with the first demoniac. In this latter case, a contrast had already been made between Jesus, who “taught” with *exousía*, and “the scribes” of the old Torah.

We then see that this *exousía* is tied to Jesus’ “teaching.” Now, we have said that “teaching” can here be the equivalent of “Torah,” priestly teaching. The purpose of this teaching was to draw the Israelite near to God, or to keep God in his midst, as a source of protection and blessing. All of Israel’s misfortunes had come from not living up to this consecration as a special people, Yahweh’s particular possession, with a priestly character and (as Ugo Vanni, S.J., says) with a royal responsibility (cf. Exod 19:5-6; Rev

1:6). Israel had become mixed up with unclean peoples and had imitated them, falling into idolatry; see Lev 18:24-30; Ezek 8; 16. This was the state of things after the Fall. But it was expected that in the End God would intervene to restore the original state, the one intended in the beginning. This is what is described in Dan 7: dominion is taken away from the beasts, and is returned (or given in a new and more excellent way) to the “Son of man,” Human Being as represented by a prototype, but here described in exalted terms, Dan 7:13-14. This is the Kingdom of God, final salvation, including resurrection and the final rewards and punishments, Dan 12.

Jesus in Mark 3 is described as the ‘strong one’ who can bind Satan. This was something that the eschatological priest in the Testament of Levi was expected to do; the Qumranites also awaited something like this —certainly they expected Melchizedek to defeat Beliar, in the final Jubilee, in the context of the Good News of Second (especially Isa 40) and Third (especially Isa 61, regarding the Anointed of the Spirit and the mourners of Zion) Isaiah. Jesus can bind Beliar, Satan, the devil. Could he not be “God’s eschatological agent” (Lohmeyer) who restores the primordial conditions of Paradise, the state of things as they were before the Fall?⁹⁴

In Mark 4:35-41, Jesus calms the tempest of Sea. We capitalize “Sea” because in the context of the Near East, in the context of Israel, and especially due to Ugaritic influence, Sea was a cosmic personage, in Ugaritic *Yamm*, *Yam* in Hebrew. Jesus rebukes Sea with the same exorcistic command (4:39) that he used in 1:25, in the programmatic episode of the first exorcism. Jesus had been sleeping in the boat, and his disciples awaken him. This reminds us of the eschatological passage of Isa 51:9-11, where Second Isaiah pleads that Yahweh awaken and again do what he did in the most remote antiquity: tame the sea monsters Rahab and Dragon, cosmic-mythological creatures.⁹⁵ These constitute something like the details of what is not minutely described in Gen 1:1-2. Yahweh had dried up (Isa 51:9) *Yam* and the waters of *Tehom*, the same word (“deep” in the RSV) as in Gen 1:2, above whose waters Yahweh’s creating-taming Spirit hovered. Second Isaiah likens this first creation with the new creation which redemption from

⁹⁴ KOBELSKI, *Melchizedek and Melchireša*, 68, says of the work of the eschatological priest in TestLevi 18: “During this new age, sin and evil come to an end. The priest of these new times will bind Belial, will open the gates of paradise, and remove the threatening sword against Adam.”

⁹⁵ See the note in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Third Edition*, 1050 HEBREW BIBLE.

Babylon signifies, an exit likened in turn to the Exodus from Egypt, when Yahweh dried up the Sea of Reeds (“Red Sea” according to the LXX). We have already referred to Exod 15, where this victory (by the way, described as that of Yahweh the “warrior,” *îš mîlh*□*amah*, “man-o’-war,” 15:3, evocative of both Yahweh in Isa 61:1-6; cf. Rev 19:11-16 and of the “Strong One” of Mark). The goal of Exod 15:15 is the temple made by God’s hands.

We can thus say that Jesus represents, or actualizes, Yahweh’s awakening after a long slumber in which he had not even spoken through prophets. It was Yahweh’s eschatological awakening, in order to make the final creation, that is, to bring his Kingdom and with it his salvation, the definitive Exodus. This is why Jesus works even on the Sabbath; see John 5:16-18.⁹⁶ We can interpret this passage in John as the Working of the New Creation which Jesus is engaged in, until he is finished (in John 19:30, when he hands over the Spirit). One does not rest until the work is finished (cf. Gen 2:2). Jesus has come to his rest (cf. Heb 10:11-14), but our rest still awaits; see Heb 4:1-11 (and the previous verses regarding the forty years in the desert).

This may help explain the difficult saying in Mark 3:28, “the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Jesus, like God, is at work on the New Creation, and had not yet finished; in Johannine terms, his ‘hour had not yet come’.⁹⁷

In Mark 5, we saw the great demoniac Legion (a possible allusion to the final beast, Rome), who calls Jesus “Son of God Most High.” We can link “Most High” (Hebrew *‘Elyôn*) with that epithet of God found especially in Gen 14, where it figures in Melchizedek’s title (Daniel makes frequent use of this appellation, in its Aramaic form,

⁹⁶ I have associated the strange 38 years in John 5:5, during which the paralytic —faithless, sinful (see verse 14) and without the desire to be healed/saved— lies uselessly, with Israel’s 38 years of useless wandering in the desert, according to Deut 2:1-2, 14. The march from Sinai-Horeb to the Holy Land (Kadesh-barnea, in this stage of Deuteronomy, is already the Holy Land, according to Norbert Lohfink) should have taken only eleven days, Deut 1:2.

⁹⁷ The profound and difficult PAUL BEAUCHAMP, in *L’uno e l’altro Testamento.2. Compiere le Scritture* (Italian translation of the original French, 1990; Milano: Glossa, 2001), discussing on page 319 John 5:17 (“My Father up to now works and I also work”), says (I translate) that with Jesus, “man’s Sabbath has reached God’s Sabbath, and this Sabbath cannot be conceived as a projection onto God of the paralytic’s immobility.” On page 321, footnote 8, citing the Epistle of Barnabas 15:8, which speaks of the eighth day as the beginning of a new world, Beauchamp says that this is “Sunday”, the day of the resurrection, wherein the seventh day (of rest) is made to coincide with the first day (that of the first day of the world and of the light); he cites W. Rordorff, *Sabato e domenica nella Chiesa antica*, SEI, Torino, 1979).

the one probably used by the demoniac in Mark 5).⁹⁸ We can thus here link Jesus' status as Son with what the Epistle to the Hebrews says, when it compares him to Moses, Heb 3:1-6. Moses was a faithful servant in God's House, but Jesus is Son of God (and therefore, heir, as in Mark 12:6-7) and himself *the builder of God's House* (cf. Mark 12:10; 14:58; 15:29).

In Mark 6:30-44, we have the first "multiplication of the loaves," in the wilderness, which reminds us of how God fed his people in the Exodus. We know that in John 6 there is a midrash on the manna and the true bread from heaven which Jesus brings, John 6:32-33. There are eucharistic overtones here (John 6:11), and also in Mark 6:41. What follows is the episode where Jesus walks on Sea, something the disciples do not understand, Mark 6:45-52 (the divine claim "I am" appears in Mark only in 6:50; 13:6 and 14:62). An interpretation of all this is that Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who gave himself, as bread (and wine, Mark 14:22-24, what Melchizedek offered in Gen 14:18 to God Most High), food for the new people of God, pilgrims on earth, but who have already entered into the Final Exodus inaugurated by Jesus. This offering is intrinsically a priestly act.

We have seen that Jesus has come to finish with evil (to destroy the "unclean spirits," which are linked with the "fountain for sin and impurity for the House of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem" in Zech 13:1-2); at that time, Jesus is called by a priestly title, Mark 1:24; Psa 106:16. He then cures a leper, something no priest (Jewish or otherwise) could do, but only God. Jesus forgives sins with *exousía* in Mark 2, which is linked to the temple act in Mark 11. He is the Lord of the Sabbath and the one who binds Satan, a function of the eschatological priest (Testament of Levi, Qumran). He acts anew in the *éschaton* in order to tame Sea, something that Yahweh was expected to do (the renewal of the feats of creation, making a new heaven and a new earth). He tames the indomitable final Beast, "Legion," who acknowledges him to be the "Son of God Most High," and he destroys a herd of pigs, impurity *par excellence*, as was the pig sacrificed on the altar of the temple in the days of Daniel and of the Maccabees, the

⁹⁸ *El 'Elyôn*, "God Most High," is a common title for God in the Hellenistic period, and is very frequent in the intertestamental literature, according to FITZMYER, *Genesis Apocryphon*, 91, who cites as examples Sir 46:5; 47:5 (apart from Daniel).

“abomination of the desolation.”⁹⁹ In Mark 5:21-43, Jesus, in two episodes intertwined by Mark, so that they interpret themselves mutually, heals an unclean woman (a danger to life, Lev 20:18, and to remaining on the Land, Lev 18:24-30), and gives life to a “little lamb” (*talitha*), the little twelve-year-old virgin, yet childless; he commands her to rise, in Aramaic, using the resurrection verb *qûm* (though the feminine imperative here should be *qûmî*). This “little lamb” that Jesus *grabs* by the hand is one of those “little lambs” (in Hebrew *l’la’im*) that the Shepherd *gathers* in Isa 40:11, when he redeems his people in the New Exodus.

After Jesus walks on Sea, and after having been told that with merely touching the fringe of his cloak people were saved, Mark 6:56, we arrive at Mark 7:1-23. We have here something central for Mark, and it is also the transition point for Jesus’ going over to the pagan zone. The discussion is with the Pharisees and some scribes come from Jerusalem, regarding certain issues of *halacha*, legal interpretation of what the Torah requires. In the gospels, there is a great polemic with the Pharisees, whose points of view prevailed in Rabbinic Judaism, the form of Judaism which survived and predominated after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. The *halachot* (plural of *halacha*) of the Sadducees (on some issues stricter than that of the Pharisees) and of the Qumranites (much stricter than the Pharisees, whom they called “seekers of smooth [easy] things, and whose name [meaning “separated ones”] they interpreted as “apostates”) disappeared with them. But we have to ask, “What was Jesus’ *halacha*, how did he “interpret” the Torah? The answer is given in Mark 7:19, where it is said that when Jesus explained what renders one unclean (or, in other words, stated his *halacha*), he was “purifying all foods.”

Is it simply a mere *declaration* that now everything is pure? (see Rom 14:14; cf. Acts 10:13-16, 28; Eph 2:14-18). Or is it rather that in the *éschaton* impurity is done away with, Zech 13:1-2; 14:20-21? It is difficult to make these distinction. Foods in and of themselves were not impure (see, for example, what Philo of Alexandria says about how delicious pork is; the prohibition had nothing to do with trichinosis or hygiene, but

⁹⁹ See LEONARD J. GREENSPOON, “Between Alexandria and Antioch. Jews and Judaism in the Hellenistic Period,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (M.D. Coogan, ed.; Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 329. The expression “abomination of the desolation” comes from Jer 7:34, the speech against the temple from which Jesus quotes in Mark 11:17. Some scholars think that according to Mark 13, there will be not only a destruction of the temple, but a final desecration (see 13:14); cf. JACQUES DUPONT, O.S.B., “La ruine du Temple et la fin des temps dans le discours de Marc 13,” in *Apocalypses et Théologie de l’espérance* (Lectio Divina 95; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1977), 207-269.

with idolatry).¹⁰⁰ The laws of Leviticus had as their purpose to separate Israel from pagans, in order to draw her close to God in pure worship, free of idolatry. But with Jesus comes the “fullness of time” (cf. Mark 1:15; Gal 4:4-11) and the new creation, Gal 6:15. There is a return to the primordial state before the Fall, before there was sin, impurity, exile from paradise, confusion of languages and the need to choose a single people from among the other nations in order to educate it in private, as it were, like home tutoring, on how to serve the one true God. We are now in the new era of the “new commandment” (cf. Mark 12:28-34) of the Kingdom, and there is no more need of sacrifices in the temple (a relic of the need to legitimize animal slaughter), because Jesus has offered his single, unique sacrifice, and with the return to Eden, there is no more killing; see Isa 11.

Now, what Jesus does in Mark 7:1-23 is precisely a priestly act: distinguishing between pure and impure, that is, provide *torot* (plural of *torah*), “priestly teachings” (such as those contained in the Torah, or that which Haggai was asked for, in Hag 2:10-14). It is what Ezekiel had prophesied the priests would do in the final period, Ezek 45:23. But what Jesus does goes much further.

Christ the Son of God works the restoration of fallen humanity. Jesus, proleptically (anticipatedly, in an incipient fashion, cf. 1 Cor 15:24-28), does away with evil, impurity and the curse which brought the Fall, represented by the healing/saving of the woman with the blood flow in Mark 5.¹⁰¹ How did this take place? Reversing, eschatologically, Adam’s fault, the “original” sin. Adam, being a mere man from the ground, had wanted to be like God, Gen 3:5. Christ, being of “divine nature” (Phil 2:6, literally, “having or possessing the form of God”), made the opposite move: he emptied himself, he divested himself of his rank, taking the form of a slave (or servant) to the point of submitting to the most ignoble death, that of crucifixion (the move most opposite to what Adam intended). Only the Son of God could accomplish this, since none other possessed the “divine condition” from which he could divest himself.¹⁰² It was thus that “he learned obedience” (Heb 5:8), what can be considered to be submission to the

¹⁰⁰ *De Specialibus Legibus*, 4:100-101, quoted in JAMES L. KUGEL, *The Bible as it was* (Cambridge, MA - London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1997), 445. That is, the most delicious meat is prohibited to Israel in order to educate her in mastering the passions, through the use of reason (what is, in other respects, consistent with rabbinic interpretations of the laws of kashrut); see 4 Macc 1:33-34; 4:16-27.

¹⁰¹ I am here inspired by STEGEMANN, *Library of Qumran*, especially pages 235-257. By the way, menstruation was impurity *par excellence*, Ezek 36:17.

¹⁰² Cf. Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:21-22.

punishment (better, “correction, discipline,” the *mûsar* of Isa 53:5) that was properly our due, the punishment or correction which was needed in order to ‘return to the Land’, the punishment which brings about conversion; see Lev 26:14-43 (there shall be a sevenfold punishment, if it be necessary, but they will then confess their iniquity); Isa 40:2 (Israel will pay double for its sin, and will then be able to make the new, or final, exodus; cf. Luke 9:31); Dan 9:1-24. With Jesus’ eschatological obedience, the cursed state of Lev 26 is undone, and the blessing of Lev 26:3-13 is inaugurated.¹⁰³ The blessing can be summarized with two images: God establishes his Dwelling amidst his people, and he walks with them again as he did in Eden, Gen 3:8; Lev 26:11. Intimacy with (“knowledge of”) God reigns again (cf. Hos 2:18-25; 1 Pet 2:4-10; Isa 11:1-10), that is, “justification” (a good relationship with God, being able to be with him), and, in its time, salvation (Rom 10:9-10; 8:22-25; 5:9-10). God’s face shines and we are saved, Psa 80; cf. 2 Cor 3:17-18.

Christ’s offering of himself made him a priest, the eschatological high priest, according to the “order” of Melchizedek, Heb 5:9-10. It is thus that he was able to sit at God’s right hand, Heb 10:12-13, as had been written in Psa 110 (cited by Jesus before the Sanhedrin in Mark 14:62). What Jesus has done is to open up a new way to God, Heb 10:19-21. This he did as priest who offered himself, Heb 9:11-14; 12:24, thus entering into the very presence of God, of which the Holy of Holies was a mere type, Heb 9:1-10. And he did it sharing our fragility, Heb 4:14-16; 2:10-18, so that we can follow him, Heb 12:1-4. We form a new temple of God in Christ, Eph 2:19-22. This is the whole of the priestly work performed by Jesus, which can only be gleaned or glimpsed in Mark’s gospel.

¹⁰³ This is not just a question of “mythology,” but is ethical: Jesus is our model for our relation to God, in order to arrive at him; cf. 1 Pet 2:21-25.