

'We are able'  
Cross-bearing Discipleship and the Way of the Lord in Mark

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In a recent article, R. Alan Culpepper notes that

. . . the [Markan] gospel of the Son of Man who accepted suffering and died in agony, bringing to an end the era of the Jerusalem temple and opening the way for a new, eschatological community, was a powerful testament. The church was the community of those who had taken up the cross, following neither Elijah nor a wonder-worker, but the suffering righteous one, whose death revealed his true identity and defined the nature of the faithful community that claimed him as the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

Culpepper gets it exactly right. Although Mark's focus is centred on Jesus<sup>2</sup> with his death permeating the whole narrative,<sup>3</sup> the call of all would-be followers of Jesus to a cross-bearing discipleship is a central feature of Mark's narrative.<sup>4</sup> The constellation of images that coalesce in Mark's gospel, brought together not least through reflection upon and conscious allusion to OT righteous suffering figures, gives a clear shape to the identity of Jesus as well as setting out the identity of the re-created people of God.<sup>5</sup> This identity is cross-shaped.

Mark's definition of discipleship comes to its climax in 10:35-45 in the dialogue between Jesus and the Zebedee brothers. The narrative sequence is instructive. Jesus has just finished his third passion prediction (10:32-34) in which the fate of the suffering Son of Man is again highlighted. The sons of Zebedee immediately make a request: *Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you*. After they have made their request, Jesus asks them a question: *Are you able to drink the cup that I*

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<sup>1</sup>R. Alan Culpepper, 'Designs for the Church in the Gospel Accounts of Jesus' Death', *NTS* 51 (2005), 381.

<sup>2</sup>See Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). See also Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 [second edition]).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 23-38.

<sup>4</sup>See Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ* (The 1988 Didsbury Lectures; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>For recent studies on intertextuality in Mark, see the essays in Thomas R. Hatina, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels: Volume 1: The Gospel of Mark* (Library of New Testament Studies 304; London: T & T Clark International, 2006). See also Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).

*drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?* (10:38).<sup>6</sup> To our surprise, they reply, *We are able*. And Jesus does not offer a sarcastic reposte. Rather, he affirms that this is exactly what they shall do: *The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized* (10:39).

The brothers' response, *we are able*, is easily dismissed as the naïve confidence of two would-be deputy-leaders and their misconstrued concept of the kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus explicitly accepts their affirmation: they will indeed share his fate in death (see 8:35). But commentators shrink from considering whether Mark might be pointing to more than the indissoluble link between discipleship and suffering. Because Jesus' death is a 'ransom for many'—and this phrase is often thought to support a particular theory of the atonement and therefore is a unique reference to the propitiation for sin offered only in Christ's death—the death of a disciple is for the cause but *is not redemptive*. Cross-bearing, on this reading, is the inevitable *consequence* of the obedience of discipleship but not *participation* in God's redemptive purposes. Insofar as this call applies to followers today, Jesus' own path to the cross is seen as the paradigm of how all<sup>8</sup> followers of Jesus are to live their lives, noted most clearly in the call to all would-be followers to take up their cross (8:33—9:1).<sup>9</sup>

But how far does this paradigmatic path of Jesus extend to the disciples? Could Mark be suggesting that disciples are called to *redemptive participation* in suffering as the means by which the followers of the Son of Man continually actualise the redemptive purposes of God? Some theologians come close to this perspective. For instance, D. J. Hall notes that Christians are "called to suffer not because suffering is good or beneficial or ultimately rewarding . . . but called to suffer *because there is suffering*—that is, because God's creatures, including human beings are already suffering, because 'the whole creation groans'."<sup>10</sup> Clearly this sharing in the groaning of

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<sup>6</sup>All translations are either New Revised Standard Version or my own.

<sup>7</sup>See N. T. Wright. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1993) for a comprehensive reading of Jesus' counter-cultural conception of the kingdom of God. The misperceptions held by the disciples in Mark is a commonplace of Markan scholarship.

<sup>8</sup>But see J. C. O'Neill, "Did Jesus teach that his death would be vicarious?" in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. by William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: CUP, 1981). O'Neill gives strong support to the view that Jesus as Messiah is prepared to die for the world as a sacrifice for sin but is less persuasive in his conclusion that Jesus chooses a small group of men to be members of his messianic court who would die with him.

<sup>9</sup>See Larry Hurtado, "Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark – and Beyond" in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. by Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 9-29. Hurtado is one of many recent scholars who address this topic.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in our Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 152, his italics.

creation is an important, if often neglected, point in Paul, a point to which we shall return briefly later. But may we go even further? Is there a sense in which suffering is in any sense redemptive? There are signs in Mark that this is indeed the case, seen in the portrait of Jesus and his disciples that Mark paints, and confirmed against the broader canvas of the Second Temple Period. When seen in this light, this perspective also shows affinity with other NT thinkers, including Paul and the writer of Hebrews, and coheres with a thoroughly Wesleyan perspective of the people of God.

### **Jesus and his Disciples**

The identity and call of the disciples is inextricably bound up with Jesus' identity and mission.<sup>11</sup> Although there are several ways that this is established, only two can be canvassed in this study: Son of God, and Son of Man. Mark begins by telling his readers that the whole narrative is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>12</sup> The phrase forms an *inclusio* with the words of the centurion in 15:39. These serve as literary markers enclosing the bulk of Mark's narrative, indicating that Mark intends to develop through the story precisely what he means by "Son of God."

Two "Son of God" ascriptions occur in Mark's passion narrative. Each also contributes to our understanding of character and life of the people of God. At the trial scene in 14:61 the high priest asks "Are you the messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" At one level, this two-fold identification stays within conventional second temple images for messiah and Son of the Blessed One. But the response of the Markan Jesus moves beyond both descriptions through the evocative phrase Ἐγώ εἰμι ("I am") combined with a second phrase, the enigmatic Son of Man.<sup>13</sup> At the narrative level this combination in a cultic, judging and triumphant role occurs in a context in which the authority of the temple establishment is challenged. Although Jesus is being mocked as a false prophet, his response foreshadows the darkness at noon and the rending of the

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<sup>11</sup>This section is heavily dependent on K. E. Brower, 'The Holy One and his Disciples: Holiness and Ecclesiology in Mark' in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. by K. E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup>Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]. Although υἱοῦ θεοῦ may be disputed on textual grounds alone, on literary grounds it should be read.

<sup>13</sup>Son of Man will be given a brief notice later. Current work on the Son of Man continues. P. M. Casey is publishing a new book announced as *The Solution to the 'Son of Man' Problem* (London: Continuum, 2007). Robert E. Snow is completing his PhD thesis under the title 'The Priestly Son of Man in Mark', to be submitted to The University of Manchester later this year.

temple veil from top to bottom (15:33-38). The whole death scene is shown by its very structure to be the action of God.<sup>14</sup> God's action enables the establishment of the new temple 'not made with hands'. Jesus and the new covenant community established in his blood of the covenant (see 14:24), the locus of God's dwelling. The consequence is clear. The fate of the temple, already predicted in Mark 13, is set in motion. At this point, the centurion at the cross says Ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν.<sup>15</sup> For Mark, Jesus' death is the clearest revelation of the character and action of God. This God enters into the human condition of suffering and alienation, embraces and transforms it.

Mark's picture of Jesus as Son of God is further enhanced through the exorcisms and the testimony of the unclean spirits. The most interesting exorcism for our purpose is the first (1:23-28). According to Mark, this is the first action of Jesus in the company of disciples. Heretofore in the narrative the disciples have no explicit knowledge of Jesus' identity. But a man with an unclean spirit enters the synagogue where Jesus has been teaching and cries out, *I know who you are, the Holy One of God* (οἶδά σε τίς εἶ, ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ). Mark takes it for granted that the unclean spirits know Jesus' identity. They participate in the same 'unseen world'. After another exorcism Mark generalises, noting in 3:11, *whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, 'You are the Son of God!'* Mark considers this to be routine: unclean spirits "recognize Jesus' transcendent status."<sup>16</sup> Legion (in 5:7) attempts to resist exorcism by naming Jesus as *the Son of the Most High God*.<sup>17</sup> Although the "Holy One of God" and the "Son of the Most High God" are not identical, together they signal the identity of Jesus and the character of his ministry. This ministry is directed to the restoration or re-creation of the people of God. The context of impurity (unclean spirit in the tombs) suggests that the exorcisms in general are signs of "the perfection of Israel restored."<sup>18</sup> Although holiness and purity are not synonymous, Mark sees them as closely related. Purity, however, is more than simply

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<sup>14</sup>See K. E. Brower, "Elijah in the Markan Passion Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983): 85-101.

<sup>15</sup>See K. E. Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2005), 145, note 221. See also R. T. France *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/ Paternoster, 2002), 659-60.

<sup>16</sup>L. W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 287.

<sup>17</sup>A range of interesting issues is raised by the chapter 5 exorcism but for our purposes, Legion's question is the point: *What have you to do with us, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου?*(5:7). Here the emphasis is again upon Jesus' identity.

external purification. The exorcisms, which deal with unclean spirits, tie Jesus' identity closely to the OT expectation of Yahweh's dwelling in the midst of his holy people as the Holy One.

Support for the significance of Jesus' identity as Son of God/Holy One of God for the people of God comes early. The Baptist stories set Jesus' identity firmly within the eschatological expectations of the Second Temple. John is *the voice in the wilderness*. The wilderness theme<sup>19</sup> in Deutero-Isaiah<sup>20</sup> is also present in Isaiah 11 where it is tied to the notion of the returning remnant (see Isa 11:11), itself "a powerful symbol of restoration."<sup>21</sup> It signals that the good news announced by the Baptist centres on God's renewal of his people.<sup>22</sup> The time of the eschatological restoration of the people of God has arrived. The re-creation of the people of God is underway. The arrival of the Kingdom of God is NOW and John's work is the opening scene.<sup>23</sup>

According to Isaiah, God himself will lead his people in a new exodus, redeeming his people. Now this is predicated of Jesus, a point made explicit throughout by the subtle modifications Mark makes to the cited texts.<sup>24</sup> This changes the tone significantly. In short, John is the forerunner of Jesus who, in turn, is acting as God acts, rather than the forerunner of God's messianic agent who awaits the arrival of God. John is already restoring the people of God in preparation for *God's* return to his people. John calls the people to repent and be baptised, thus creating a holy people fit for a holy God.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 157.

<sup>19</sup>Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and its Basis in the Biblical Tradition* (SBT 39; London: SCM, 1963), 82. See now Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 23-26 who, however, thinks the prophetic context is primary.

<sup>20</sup>See especially Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997). See also Thomas R. Hatina, *In Search of a Context: The Function of Scripture in Mark's Narrative* (JSNTSup 232/SSEJC 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup>Meyer, *Aims*, 118. Isaiah 35 is especially interesting. The entire chapter is devoted to the return from exile of the redeemed people of God through the wilderness on the way of the Lord. See Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 37.

<sup>22</sup>The Qumran community cites this text as its motivation for establishing a community in the wilderness. See IQS 8:13-14.

<sup>23</sup>M. D. Hooker, *St Mark* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1991), 37.

<sup>24</sup>The text of Isa 40:3 is modified by changing τοῦ θεοῦ to αὐτοῦ. Mal 3:1 is changed in a variety of ways under the influence of Exod 23:20. See France, *Gospel of Mark*, 64, for a plausible explanation.

<sup>25</sup>See Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See especially Markus Öhler, *Elia im Neuen Testament: Untersuchungen für Bedeutung des alttestamentlichen Propheten in Frühen Christentum* (BZNW; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

The response to John's preaching is set out in historically exaggerated terms, no doubt—*πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία χώρα καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες*—but attention to this misses Mark's point. For him this is a renewal of the people of God who are coming *from Jerusalem and Judaea* and are coming *into the wilderness* to be baptised by John. The call by John in the wilderness recalls the narrowing process that always attends the wilderness—the remnant survives in the wilderness.<sup>26</sup> In Mark's view God is doing a new thing (see Isa. 43:3, 19): "in and through the remnant of Israel God reconstitute[s] his holy people."<sup>27</sup> They are the new purified people of God, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, whose sins are forgiven.

Mark's narrative suggests that John also fulfils the role of *Elijah*.<sup>28</sup> In his ministry Elijah's role as the restorer of the people to covenant faithfulness has been accomplished.<sup>29</sup> But this is still a preparatory role. John has completed his task of setting the stage for the coming one, Jesus Messiah, Son of God, the Holy One of God. The restored holy people of God are ready for the mightier one to baptise them with Holy Spirit and lead them on his mission.

All this is confirmed by the voice from heaven that sets out Jesus' identity in 1:10-11. Here Jesus sees *the heavens torn apart* (*σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς*) *and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved.'* In Mark, Jesus alone sees the rending of the heavens and hears the voice identifying and affirming his mission in language echoing Ps 2:7, Isa 42:1 and Gen 22:2. Through the subtle use of OT allusions and highlighting the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, Mark shows us that Jesus is now the locale of God amongst his people. He is actually the Holy One in their midst, bringing the end time to pass.

Immediately after the people have been prepared and the identity of Jesus is established (1:9-13), Mark gives a summary of the message of Jesus (1:14-15): *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news* (1:15). That which the Baptist has announced has come and the decisive time has arrived. ". . . a new era of fulfillment has begun, and it calls for a response

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<sup>26</sup>Thanks to Professor Bernard Jackson, The University of Manchester, for some of the ideas in this section.

<sup>27</sup>Meyer, *Aims*, 118. An interesting intertextual possibility may be suggested between Isa 43:19-20 and Mark 1:13.

<sup>28</sup>For a further discussion see of the relationship between John and Jesus, Brower, "Elijah."

<sup>29</sup>Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 90. Bryan argues that "through John the 'restoration of all things' [Mark 9:12] was both complete and successful." See also Hooker, *Mark*, 220, 37.

from God's people."<sup>30</sup> This preaching about the Kingdom of God follows after the temptation, which, in turn, is followed by the selection of the first disciples (1:16-20). Mark's narrative sequence shows that the announcing and effecting of God's rule requires a people called to embody and proclaim this good news (see Exod 19:6).

But it is only when we get to 3:14-15 that the full significance of the disciples and their reason for existence is set out. This section is highly evocative. Jesus goes *up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons*. At first, this gives the impression of Jesus as a second Moses. But the combination of images and allusions [mountain,<sup>31</sup> call to come to him, creating twelve<sup>32</sup> to be with him, on his mission and on his authority—as well as in the wider narrative—Jesus' identity as the Holy One of God, the Son of the Most High God, the Trinitarian shape of the Baptism, the explicit exclusion of the view that he is either Elijah or Moses *redivivus* (see 9:4)] all these give a different impression: Jesus is more than a new Moses.

These disciples are called to the mountain by the Holy One and brought into a relationship with him. If this alludes at all to Exodus 24:9-11, where Moses and the elders are called to the mountain to eat with Yahweh, it may well give greater significance both to this mountain call and to the last supper. The number Twelve could hardly be mistaken for anything other than the re-creation of the old and full people of God made up of "radically disparate elements."<sup>33</sup> By being with Jesus, they are re-created as a holy nation with the Holy One of God dwelling in their midst. When they are on his mission, they are acting as the people of God, a kingdom of priests. A community has always been essential for the mission of God to his created order. In Meyer's perceptive words, "Israel, in short, understood salvation in ecclesial terms."<sup>34</sup>

But Mark also wants to give an even more inclusive description to the people of God. Just after Jesus appoints the Twelve, he returns home (3:19b). The sequence

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<sup>30</sup>France, *Gospel of Mark*, 93.

<sup>31</sup>The locale is deliberate. So Hooker, *Mark*, 111, *contra* Robert A. Guelich, *Mark I—8:26* (WBC 34A; Waco: Word, 1989), 156.

<sup>32</sup>See Luke 22:30. See also 1 Cor 6:2 where Paul reminds the saints that they are to judge the world, not to mention angels. Their designation as 'the Twelve' may also signal that they have more significance as a group than as individuals who are formed into a group. We rarely hear of them as individuals (but see 14:29f; 16:7).

<sup>33</sup>Meyer, *Aims*, 154. See also Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 98, who draws attention to Sirach, 48:10.

<sup>34</sup>Meyer, *Aims*, 134.

which began with the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 2 closes with the story of Jesus' family. In 3:31-35 Mark tells us that his mother and his brothers are *standing outside* asking for him while at the same time a crowd is *sitting around* him. Jesus asks a rhetorical question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" The response is blunt: "And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'" (3:35). The new people of God are those gathered around Jesus and who do the will of God.

### **Cross-Bearing and the Will of God**

The Markan Jesus is blunt and explicit about the will of God and his own fate. He fulfills God's purpose by going to Jerusalem to die.<sup>35</sup> In three so-called passion predictions, which stand at the heart of his teaching to his followers about what it means to be Messiah, Jesus uses them to teach his disciples about the meaning of discipleship. For Mark, discipleship is primarily about following Jesus on the way. And that is the path to the cross. It should not surprise, then, when Jesus calls all who would follow him to take up their cross (8:33). The cross was anything but the benign religious symbol it has become today. Resistance could be expected. But according to the Markan Jesus, human resistance to cross-bearing aligns people with the forces of evil, working against the will of God rather than for it.

If there were any doubt that this call to cross-bearing is a divine call, the narrative continues with the Transfiguration including the instance of the second 'voice from heaven' (9:7; cf. 12:6). The placement of the story here is hardly accidental. Jesus has just been identified as "Messiah" by Peter in 8:27-30 and, in the first passion prediction, has immediately reinterpreted that confession in terms of a suffering Son of Man (8:31). Jesus then calls the crowd along with the disciples to follow him in cross-bearing. The divine purpose and character of this call is confirmed in the Transfiguration. Attention has often been placed on the clothes of Jesus or the presence of Elijah with Moses—and all of these are important. But the voice from heaven is a

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<sup>35</sup>In key texts, Mark uses the 'divine passive' to describe Jesus' direction. See 1:14—παράδοθῆναι for his arrest; 8:33—δεῖ for his handing over to the authorities and 14:21—παράδιδεται for his betrayal.

pointed reminder to the three that Jesus' message is God's message. If they wish to set their minds on divine rather than human things, they will need to listen to Jesus, the suffering Son of Man who announces his own fate and invites others to follow him. Jesus alone hears the 'voice from heaven' at his baptism (1:10-11); this time, three disciples also hear it. The path of cross-bearing servanthood is the path God has laid out for Jesus *and his followers*. And this is God's way.

If all of this coheres with Son of God, Holy One of God, and Beloved Son language, what are we to make of the 'Son of Man' in Mark 10:45? Obviously, this is neither the time nor the place to enter into the Son of Man debate. But there are some points of importance for our purpose. The intertextual background of this passage combines the 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7:13, the figure who represents the people, the Holy Ones of the most high (Dan 7:17-27) with the suffering figure of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The Isaianic passage is highly significant, not only because of the (relatively few) direct quotations that occur in the NT, but more generally in the widespread allusion to the suffering servant of Yahweh. The servant of God motif shapes Jesus' whole ministry and mission, a mission which is the restoration of the people of God.<sup>36</sup> This allusive background is the reason that Morna Hooker concludes that the language of 'ransom for many' evokes the whole "of God's basic activity in saving his people and establishing them as his people."<sup>37</sup> If this is so, "what these words in Mark 10:45 affirm, then, is not that Jesus' death saves certain individuals, but that it is the saving action by which God establishes his new people."<sup>38</sup> Further support for this view comes from a broader understanding of 'Son of Man'.

Over 80 years ago, T. W. Manson<sup>39</sup> argued that the term 'Son of Man' has a collective overtone. In Manson's view, the Son of Man "is an ideal figure and stands for the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth in a people wholly devoted to their heavenly King."<sup>40</sup> This perception of Manson's has attracted far less attention than it deserves. It seems to have been submerged in the morass of the Son of Man debate that occupied scholarship for at least the next fifty years, not least the question of the authenticity of the SM sayings. But this collective, corporate aspect of the Son of Man

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<sup>36</sup>See James R. Edwards, 'The Servant of the Lord and the Gospel of Mark' in Hatina, *Biblical*, 49-63.

<sup>37</sup>Hooker, *Not Ashamed*, 55.

<sup>38</sup>Hooker, *Not Ashamed*, 56.

<sup>39</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: CUP, 1935, second edition), 211-236.

<sup>40</sup>Manson, 227.

needs to be considered afresh. On the one hand, Mark clearly uses SM as a designation of Jesus. But Manson argues that it is also is a term which effectively embodies the people of God. Too much attention to the fate of Jesus as Son of Man "may easily blind us to another correspondence, equally striking, between the 'Son of Man' predictions and the demands made by Jesus on his disciples. . . . discipleship is synonymous with sacrifice and suffering and the cross itself. . . . [Thus Jesus] and his followers *together* should share that destiny . . . that he and they *together* should be the Son of Man, the Remnant that saves by service and self-sacrifice, the organ of God's redemptive purpose in the world."<sup>41</sup> Hence, when the Markan Jesus uses this term in 10:45 at the end of the sequence from 10:33, the implication is that the disciples are included in the reference.

Perhaps Manson's picture of the Son of Man needs some modification,<sup>42</sup> but his central view that the disciples are invited to share in the *redemptive* activity of God in Christ can be supported in Mark, especially in the passion narrative. For Mark it is important that the Last Supper, the act of institution for the new covenant people, is set in the context of Passover. Mark's language is heavily laden with scriptural images (new exodus; new covenant; blood of the covenant; blood poured out for the many—see Exod 24:8; Jer 31:31-34; Zech 9:11; Isa 53:12), images which Jesus evokes at the Last Supper. Through his prophetic representative action of breaking the bread he participates in his own death; through pouring out the wine he establishes the new covenant in *his* blood. The disciples, Mark tells us, all drank of the cup and thereby become participants in the new covenant community.<sup>43</sup> These disciples, already called out and active in the new life of the kingdom of God centred on Jesus, are now constituted as the new covenant community. In Mark this is finally accomplished through Jesus' death. "Here is the basis of a thoroughgoing Christian ecclesiology in relation to the people of God in the OT."<sup>44</sup>

For our purposes, the intratextual link between 14:24, where the new covenant in his blood is poured out for the many (ὕπερ πολλῶν), and 10:45, where the Son of Man offers his life as a ransom for many (ἀντὶ πολλῶν) is important. Although Manson

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<sup>41</sup>Manson, 231.

<sup>42</sup>It could be argued, for example, that he pays insufficient attention to the fact that the flesh-and-blood Jesus of Mark is the Son of Man.

<sup>43</sup>Paul warns against drinking the cup of demons because it sets up a κοινωνία, a participation, with demons. The same view pertains here.

may overstate his case when he concludes that “by dying Jesus has brought the Son of Man into existence,”<sup>45</sup> the notion that Jesus as the Son of Man is the locus of God’s presence incorporating the people of God is precisely what we find in Mark.

This perception is further supported by the implications of the death scene itself. Through the use of irony and a variety of inter-textual and inter-textual links, Mark shows in the passion narrative that the locus of God’s dwelling is now in the temple ‘not made with hands’<sup>46</sup> and not the Jerusalem temple. As Jesus dies, ostensibly as a failed insurrectionist and a messianic pretender, judgement is being exercised by God on the very heart of the Temple by opening the ναός.<sup>47</sup> With judgement on the ναός it could only be a matter of time before there would not be “one stone upon another” in το ἱερός (13:20). Now, for Mark, the Holy of Holies is no longer the locus of God’s dwelling. A new ναός ἀχειροποίητον οἰκοδομήσω is emerging. It is the new covenant community, already established in his blood (see 14:24). This is the people who respond to Jesus’ call; it is they who do the will of the God (3:38), not those arrayed against Jesus from chapter 11 onwards. The identity of the people of God is wholly determined by their relationship to Jesus. And this new people, the dwelling place of God in Christ, are on God’s mission, announcing and effecting his mission, and acting in his way. It is not, therefore, a step too far to argue that Mark thinks Jesus’ followers are called to share fully in his *redemptive* suffering.

### **Suffering and Martyrdom in Second Temple Texts**

Can this type of view be supported from other late 2TP texts? Heretofore, this discussion has been limited to narrative considerations in Mark. But when one remembers that the whole context of the second temple period is one of occupation, a context of overt suffering in the face of oppressors is heightened. To be sure, the ordinary people probably continue with life under the Seleucid and Roman rulers in much the same way that people always exist in repressive circumstances. In modern

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<sup>44</sup>France, *Gospel of Mark*, 570.

<sup>45</sup>Manson, 235.

<sup>46</sup>For a full development of this argument, see K. E. Brower, “‘Let the Reader Understand’: Temple and Eschatology in Mark” in *Eschatology in Bible and Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of the Millennium* ed. by K. E. Brower and Mark Elliott, eds. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 119-143.

<sup>47</sup>See Brower, “Elijah,” *passim* and R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York/London: Doubleday/Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 1100. The same word is used in 1:10 to describe the rending of the heavens at the spirit’s descent on Jesus.

terms, they live below the radar. But at a deeper level, some texts suggest that suffering and death are viewed by some as more than simply 'the way things are'. Only a brief notice of a few examples can be given here.<sup>48</sup>

The biblical motif of the righteous sufferer is widespread in the Wisdom and the prophetic tradition. Earlier we noted the importance of Isa 52:13-53:12 as pointing to redemptive suffering. In turn, this, and other righteous sufferer/suffering servant texts seem to have been influential in a number of subsequent reflections on suffering. Passages like 1 Maccabees 2:27-38, which describes the flight of Mattiathias and his sons from the king's officer after they *burn with zeal for the law*, do not attach a particularly redemptive character to the martyrdom. 1 Maccabees, therefore, is rather restrained. Eleazar in 2 Maccabees 6:18-7:42, who welcomes *death with honour rather than live a life with pollution* (6:19), dies saying, *It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating. But in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him* (6:30). The language describes a willingness to die in faithfulness to God. But 2 Maccabees goes further in the direction of redemptive suffering, having some of the brothers say, *we are suffering because of our own sins. But if our living God is angry with us for a little while to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. . . . and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation* (7:32, 38). Here we find the view that the suffering is deserved because of the sins of the people and that the suffering is somehow purgative. It is likely that this is more than the personal sins of the brothers since, according to 7:38, the death of the brothers is thought to propitiate the wrath of God that has overtaken the nation. This latter passage moves very close to the notion of an atoning sacrifice that propitiates the god.

But the clearest connection to atonement is in 4 Maccabees 6:27-29, where, as he is dying, Eleazar says, *You know, O God, that though I might have saved myself, I*

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<sup>48</sup>See John S. Pobee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (JSNTSSS 6; Sheffield: SAP, 1984). Space does not permit the consideration of the Aqedah tradition. See Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition* (Studia Post-Biblica 4; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961) and Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: CUP, 1990, second edition). Philip Davies and Bruce Chilton argue that the Jewish teaching that Isaac's death was redemptive did not arise in Judaism before the second century AD. See P. R. Davies and B. D. Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History", *CBQ* 40 (1978), 514-46, cited in J. C. O'Neill, "Did Jesus teach that his death would be vicarious?",

*am dying in burning torments for the sake of the law. Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs.* The language of atonement is unmistakable here, all in the context of punishment, interchange and atonement.<sup>49</sup>

If righteous individuals see themselves at atoning through martyrdom, Deasley<sup>50</sup> has shown that the Qumran sectarians see themselves as in some sense atoning for the land simply by their separation from the pollution of the people and their perfect obedience to the law. They atone for their own sins through the process of admission to the sect. But they also see themselves as the agents of atonement through withdrawal from temple and perfect obedience.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, "the most striking of all their beliefs", says Bruce, is "the conception of their duty as the making of expiation . . . for the sins of the nation which had gone so far astray from the path of [God's] will."<sup>52</sup> This is not, however, independent action. They still see the atonement emanating from God. As Deasley notes, "the community [is] the instrumental cause."<sup>53</sup> Atonement is wrought by God through the working of the Holy Spirit, but the main purpose of the community is to make atonement for the land. Because Israel failed to keep the covenant and because the Temple worship was currently irredeemable, only the obedience offered by the sectaries could save Israel. This perfect obedience would be the fulfilment of Israel's covenant obligations. If they walked in the ways of perfection, they could offer to God the perfect worship he demanded.<sup>54</sup> Thus they intended to live in complete conformity to the law. In sum, Qumran theology placed soteriology at the centre of their belief. The performance of covenant obligations, the role of the community, had the salvation of Israel as its goal. Here, then, is a context within 2TJ in which obedience and suffering is understood, even in a narrow sense, as atonement.

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*Suffering and Martyrdom* 13, note 3. O'Neill thinks, however, that the Aqedah does offer a background for the notion of redemptive martyrdom.

<sup>49</sup>The date of 4 Maccabees is uncertain. Most scholars think it is written in Greek and reflects diaspora Judaism.

<sup>50</sup>A. R. G. Deasley, *The Shape of Qumran Theology* (The 1984 Didsbury Lectures; Paternoster: Carlisle, 2000).

<sup>51</sup>Deasley, 225ff.

<sup>52</sup>Deasley, 226, citing F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Paternoster, 1964), 113.

<sup>53</sup>Deasley, 227.

<sup>54</sup>Deasley, 238.

## **Redemptive Suffering outside the Gospels**

If Mark's call to cross-bearing includes the notion of redemptive suffering, is this notion part of the picture elsewhere in the NT? Suffering, of course, is a major theme in the rest of the NT. The epistles, as occasional letters, are generally addressed to people who are the marginalised in imperial Rome and frequently are also marginalised from their own sub-cultures within society. 1 Peter, for instance, is very concerned about the experience of the recipients of the epistle. But while 1 Peter speaks at length about unjust suffering (see 1 Peter 3:13—5:11), this suffering is expected as a consequence of being a follower of Christ. Furthermore, Christ has left us an example of how to respond to oppression and abuse (1 Peter 2:21; 3:17). But it seems that suffering in 1 Peter has little, if any, redemptive significance. It seems to be simply the inevitable consequence of identification with Christ.

The same cannot be said for the Apocalypse. Here is suffering, oppression and martyrdom on a grand scale. The Roman empire looms large over the entire landscape. The prophetic message to the beleaguered churches is actually to give them courage to resist the blandishments of the empire. The seer warns them against being seduced by the economic prosperity and security maintained by the ruthless exercise of the empire's military power. This is a false security based upon a parody of peace. Flemming writes,

"What the seer sees—and many of his readers do not—is that by making peace with the ways of the Empire, these *ekklēsiai* are guilty of collusion with an entire system of political, economic, and religious power, another kingdom/empire, which demands an allegiance that is due to God alone. . . . [In its place John] offers these churches an alternative vision of . . . reality *as it really is*, from the standpoint of God's future and God's throne."<sup>55</sup>

In the light of this, they must resist the empire's power even if it costs them (see 6:9). This suffering is more than a consequence of their faithful obedience to their Lord.

The crucial point for our purposes is that "through their very suffering and death, God's people *participate in Christ's triumph* over Satan and evil."<sup>56</sup> Richard Bauckham's perceptive and persuasive theological reading of the Apocalypse confirms Flemming's view. Bauckham writes, ". . . John's message is not, 'Do not resist!' It is, 'Resist!—but

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<sup>55</sup>Dean Flemming, "'On Earth as It Is in Heaven': Holiness and the People of God in Revelation" in Brower and Johnson, *Holiness and Ecclesiology*, forthcoming.

<sup>56</sup>Flemming, "On Earth", my italics.

by witness and martyrdom, not by violence.' . . . In so doing they will be playing *an indispensable part in the working-out of the Lamb's victory*. . . . Their faithful witness to the point of death participates in the power of the victory Christ won by his faithful witness to the point of death."<sup>57</sup> They 'follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (14:4). So the seer invites them to raise their eyes above the horizon of the mundane and to view the big picture. Although their suffering is appalling and the temptation to subscribe to the Pax Romana is strong, he reminds them that they are actual participants in a far bigger drama in which God's big purposes for them and his entire created order are being fulfilled. And God will turn the worst that the temporal powers can do to them into triumph, because they participate in the victory already won through the Lamb who was slaughtered.

Although the Epistle to the Hebrews emphasises the once-for-allness of the death of Jesus (see 10:10, 14) in contrast to the obsolete old covenant and its ordinances, the writer is also keen to remind readers that Jesus actually shares their very flesh and blood (2:10, 14, 18; 4:15). Therefore, he is a faithful and merciful high priest as well as their forerunner and model. But in these passages, the suffering that the pilgrims endure is not particularly redemptive, although the cost of following Jesus is highlighted. Towards the end of the epistle, however, the link between suffering and redemptive action becomes clearer. In 10:32-34, the readers are reminded of earlier times when they *endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated*. In this context, they *not only served those who were in prison but they cheerfully accepted the plundering of their possession*. Their pattern of suffering is remarkably parallel to that of Jesus. In 12:2, our writer tells us that Jesus *for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God*. In their own circumstances of persecution and abuse, therefore, they are to consider the pattern of Jesus *who endured such hostility against himself from sinners*. Although this in itself does not speak of redemptive suffering in the narrow sense, it is suffering that is exactly like that endured by Jesus and issues in redemptive compassion and ministry patterned after Jesus. Indeed, despite the persecution they are receiving, they are to *pursue*

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<sup>57</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 92, my italics.

*peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord, perhaps a summary echo of the Matthean Jesus in 5:38-48.*

Finally, the writer reminds them that *Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood*. They are invited to *go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured*. This is an invitation to share in his ultimate sacrificial death, leading the writer to move directly to sacrificial language: *Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name*. To be sure, our writer does not tell them to offer their lives as an atoning sacrifice for sin—that would be quite unthinkable as a development of the argument. But they are told, *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*. There is little doubt, therefore, that the path of the Christians described in Hebrews is more than simply an endurance of suffering—it is also part of pursuing peace, doing good and sharing what they have, and at least in that sense is part of God's redemptive purpose in his world.

Paul's epistles are replete with references to suffering and cross-bearing. Here is where the theological notion of redemptive suffering emerges clearly. Recent work by Michael J Gorman is particularly pointed towards what he calls the cruciformity of Paul's theology, that is, that the lives of the people of God together are determined and shaped by the cross of Christ.<sup>58</sup> The expression that Gorman uses has now entered biblical theological vocabulary; his emphasis is a long needed one. But the notion has a long pedigree, even if it has not been prominent in recent thought.

In this same seminal book to which I drew attention earlier, Manson notes a number of passages in which Paul takes exactly the perspective that Mark does.<sup>59</sup> One passage is Colossians 1:24—*I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church* (Col 1:24).<sup>60</sup> Exegetes have made heavy weather of this verse in their attempts to avoid having Paul to say that Christ's sacrificial death in itself is insufficient for God's atoning purpose. Sometimes their

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<sup>58</sup>See Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>59</sup>Manson notes Roman 8:17; 1 Cor 12:26; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:10; 13:4.; Gal 6:17; Phil 1:29; 3:10, Col 1:24.

<sup>60</sup>See the discussion in P. T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC44; Waco: Word, 1982), 75-81, 100, for example. O'Brien sees these as part of the messianic woes that Paul absorbs so as to lessen the effect upon the church. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 486, considers this simply an elaboration on Paul's theme of sharing in Christ's suffering.

arguments sound like special pleading<sup>61</sup> but their conclusions are right: Paul regularly affirms the centrality and all-sufficiency of Christ's work of atonement as the basis of the redemption offered by God in Christ. In the wise words of Vincent Taylor, the great Methodist NT scholar, "there is no suggestion that the work of Christ is incomplete, but [being a] . . . servant of Christ involves a real participation . . . in the afflictions He endured in the fulfilment of His redemptive ministry for mankind."<sup>62</sup>

For Paul the crucial point is his full identification with Christ and his participation in Christ. In that context, Paul believes that his life and ministry are indeed directed towards active and full participation in God's big redemptive project. "It is because Paul shares in Christ's sufferings that his own are of benefit to others: it is those who are in Christ who experience the life that comes through death."<sup>63</sup> The will of God, on Paul's broad canvas as for Jesus, is the healing of the shattered and marred relationships predicated upon the human alienation from God. This reconciliation has been inaugurated in Christ—the reconciliation between God and the world and, as a consequence, the restoration of human relationships with each other and the entire created order are underway. But that is a work in progress and Paul reminds all the people of God that they are called to be agents of that reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-21).

All of this, of course, is only possible because people are 'in Christ' and therefore participate in his death and resurrection. In passage after passage, Paul's emphasis is upon being 'in Christ.' According to Phil 2:10-11, Hooker reminds us that being in Christ "means knowing him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering; it means being conformed to his death."<sup>64</sup> She then goes on to argue that "Christians must expect, not simply to die with Christ, but to *suffer* with him (Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 1:5; 4:10f.; Col 1:24) . . . these appeals are based on the assumption that Christians live in Christ: it is thus a question of sharing in what Christ is, not a question of imitation."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>See M. D. Hooker, "Interchange and Suffering" in *Suffering and Martyrdom*, ed. by Horbury and McNeil, 82, who writes "The belief that Christ's death is decisive and once-for-all has led some [commentators] to shy away from the straightforward meaning of the words."

<sup>62</sup>Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Epworth, 1940), 71. See also R. McL Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon* (ICC; London: T and T Clark International—A Continuum Imprint, 2005), 169-172.

<sup>63</sup>Hooker, "Interchange and Suffering", 78.

<sup>64</sup>M. D. Hooker, " ", *NTS* 35 (1989): 332. The article, of course, is important for her balanced and insightful discussion of the faith/faithfulness of Christ debate.

<sup>65</sup>Hooker, " ", 339, her italics.

Hooker's perspective at this point coheres with Gorman's. The identification of believers with Christ, their participation in the very being of Christ is Paul's description of the existence of believers. But this identification goes far beyond wearing a badge, or carrying an identity card. "Believers are those who identify so fully with Christ's cross that Paul can say, 'I have been crucified with Christ' and that this same crucified (but now obviously resurrected) Christ lives 'in me.' That is, believers experience a kind of resurrection by means (paradoxically) of co-crucifixion."<sup>66</sup> Or, in the words of Hooker, "the Gospel of Christ crucified . . . is not a mere objective fact to be believed . . . but a way of live to be lived. Christian discipleship means identification with the crucified Lord. . . . Those who follow this path of faith must be prepared to share the humiliation and suffering that it brings, if they wish to experience also the glory that God gives."<sup>67</sup>

The implications of this for God's holy people as Paul conceives of them are significant. Paul does not have in mind a legalist imitation of Christ that seeks suffering for its own sake, nor a suffering that is actually turned in on itself in some sort of self-sacrifice (see 1 Cor 13:1). Nor is it merely obedience to Christ, although obedience to the law of Christ actually sums up the Spirit's work in the community (see Gal 5:14, 16-26). The difference between imitation of Christ and participation in Christ is foundational to our existence as God's holy people because it is a whole being existence. We are called to live redemptively in the world as part of God's mission to the world and through being 'in Christ'. But this kind of life is one that continues to experience both the death and resurrection of Christ. Our lives experience the pain of alienation and the anguish of creation (see Rom 8:17-39) in solidarity with all creation continues alongside our living as God's holy new creation people in the midst of life as well as the security of our existence in the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. As the new people of God, alive in Christ, our lives are completely bound up with him. Gorman expresses Paul's perspective this way:

"Paul's experience of Christ . . . leads him to reconstruct his understanding of both God's holiness and human holiness as embodied in the story of Christ's kenosis in incarnation and death. Living out this story is a communal, counter-cultural affair. . . . This cruciform holiness means, in sum, becoming like Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Father and

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<sup>66</sup>Michael J. Gorman, "You shall be Cruciform for I am Cruciform": Paul's Trinitarian Reconstruction of Holiness" in Brower and Johnson, *Holiness and Ecclesiology*, forthcoming.

<sup>67</sup>Hooker, "Interchange and Suffering," 83.

the Son, and thus also becoming like God—for God is Christ-like. “You shall be cruciform for I am cruciform,” says the Lord.”<sup>68</sup>

Thus the call to cross-bearing discipleship for the followers of Jesus which is such an integral part of Mark’s telling of the story of Jesus finds solid confirmation throughout the NT. Jesus is not merely an historical figure from the past. Mark concludes by having the young man at the tomb say to the women, *But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you* (16:7). He promises to lead his disciples in a continuation of the mission of announcing and effecting the good purposes of God in and for the world. They now know that the path of cross-bearing concludes in the vindication of Jesus through resurrection—the promise applies to them as well when they *drink the cup*. And the people of God throughout the ages experience this in their lives. This invitation to ‘come and die’ in Mark is more than *imitatio Christi*. Instead, it coheres with Paul’s own sense of call, the *fellowship of Jesus’ sufferings, being like him in his death* (κοινωνίαν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ) Phil 3:10. This is indeed a call to redemptive suffering, to cruciform living in which the new people of God, by participating in Christ, share in the redemptive mission of God in his world, in Christ, through the power of the Spirit. For Wesleyans who believe that the good news of the Gospel is for all, and is for now as well as the future, the call to redemptive suffering servanthood defines who we are as the people of God.

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<sup>68</sup>Gorman, “You shall be Cruciform”.