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Grassroots (Political) Economics of Jesus in Mark

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1 Context—Global Recession

We are now in an unprecedented global recession. Working-poor, jobless, laid-off, homeless etc., are the popular words we hear almost every day. The powerless represented by women, the young, the disabled and the aged are suffering the most. They are also those with the least financial foundation.

Needless to say a monetary economy is inevitable for survival in this modern world, but the maldistribution of wealth has caused a severe difference in economic situations between the developed and the developing countries. In addition, a mind-set based on patriarchy/kyriarchy has not stopped the rule by chosen elites and the tremendous gap between the rich and the poor in most countries.

Free market system based on capitalism has resulted in serious classism. It is needless to say the extreme discrepancy between the haves and have-nots is linked with the political situation of the world. It is obviously not possible for the contemporary world to accomplish decolonization through economic globalization or borderless markets. There are more politically colonized regions. Japan has become militarily colonized and play a part in the world military regime. Churches keep silent on the political premise that does not allow us to say we need neither the US army bases or the Security Treaty.

There seems a similarity between our situation in which it is impossible to think of peace without warfare, and the Roman military regime that Jesus faced. Jesus as a citizen of Judea chose to live out the reign of God instead of the rule of militaristic empire. “ The time is fulfilled, and the reign (basileia) of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news ” (1:15).

In this paper I would like to focus on looking at what Jesus meant by “ the reign of God ” and by the

grassroots economy practiced by Jesus and his community of faith.

2 Jesus and his Community

It is interesting to ask what images or ideals Jesus and his community held on the economy under the colonial rules of the Roman Empire. The Judean government that fawned upon the Roman power and the temple-centered religious authorities both functioned by oppressing the people of the lower class. We cannot expect Jesus was without any interest in economy. In fact it is not difficult to discover that Mark has stories of Jesus one after another that could not happen unless he was concerned with economic issues. (18 stories roughly counted) ¹

3 People who Followed Jesus

Who were the people who composed Jesus' community of faith? They were those whom Mark called *ochlos* (crowd). The term is used 38 times in Mark.² A striking case is found in 2:13-15: "...the whole crowd (*pas o ochlos*) gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi ...sitting at the tax booth,... And he got up and followed him(Jesus). And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many (*polloi*) tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many (*polloi*) who followed him. " Though Levi is called by name and followed Jesus, he is not counted as one of the twelve(2:13-19) in Mark. It is highly plausible to see him as belonging to the crowd. The crowd consists of those who are such people as tax collectors and sinners. There are two times that Jesus himself calls the crowd and talked to them directly (7:14; 8:13).³

Many women are also among the crowd. " There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other (*alla polloi*) women who had come up with him to Jerusalem " (15:40-41). It is interesting to notice Jesus saying in 13:37 " And what I say to you (Peter, James, John and Andrew 13:3) I say to all: Keep awake. " What Jesus tells his disciples is also told everybody else. Then disciples are also a part of the crowd.⁴

In contrast, the term *laos*(people) is used only once(14:2) to express hostility of the religious power against the people as a whole.

The crowd consists of those who are distant from the power of societal/economic/political structure, suppressed to the lower position in the class ladder, economically maldistributed and discriminated against in the patriarchal/kyriarchal society. Jesus proclaims the reign of God and the good news to such people and works with them.

4 Sense of Economy/Money of Jesus: Circulation of coin

Why are the rich attached to the money? It is true then and now. Minting coins have had deep relationship with the intention of maintaining the status quo for the power that be. During Jesus' time, major mints were located in Acco and Tyre, which gave the cities political and military supremacy. Tyre and Acco were privileged by both Syrian and Roman interests in the minting of silver.⁵

Commerce, as well as taxation, must have given some people the power they admired. In agrarian societies, however, the system of economy functions in a different way. Coins were hardly used there, even though the peasants were never excused from taxation.

Douglas E. Oakman wrote an interesting article on coins and an analysis of their use.⁶ According to him, "Money in Jesus' time was an elite political tool, not a universal economic medium. It benefitted the powerful inordinately, but held captive values esteemed by common folk." ⁷ To this Jesus responded ironically in different ways; in 10:23-27 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the reign of God" and in 10:29-31, significant words follow; "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life." The second quotation may reflect that the followers of Jesus' movement had a communal economy for sharing all the products in their particular system.

T. Raymond Hobbs writes, "Land owning was a prerequisite for politics." ⁸ But there seems to be no relationship between land owning and politics when Jesus refers to "fields" as a part of the inevitable elements of a new community of his followers. It may be more probable to read here that it was very important for the crowd, mainly farmers, who were deprived of their farm lands to regain their land back to earn their bread. What Oakman says sounds more true in Jesus' community. He writes, "Money is an idolatrous trust-center apart from God, it represents a terminal disruption in the social-construction project that Jesus envisions." ⁹

While Jesus grew up as a son of a carpenter, he must have experienced the circulation of money and learned that the economic system was highly controlled by political powers. Though avoiding engagement in the common economy of Judea, he did give harsh criticism toward the economic system that worked for the benefit of the political power. He might have pushed exchanges of goods organized through principles of reciprocity to show a critique on monetary exchange.¹⁰ Having learned the skewed system of the economy, Jesus might have taken a completely different approach for the crowd with whom he worked.

In Mark, however, there are two stories of women in which the monetary value is dealt with more

explicitly. One of them talks about a poor widow who donated the last two coins she had and the other concerns a woman who anointed Jesus with extravagantly expensive oil. Economically, there is a remarkable difference in what they spent, but a remarkably common spirit of selflessness is exemplified in both stories. I will deal with these two stories in the next section. It is enough at this point to say the first story is located just before Jesus began his harsh criticism on the temple politics/economy and the second is located just before he was arrested by those in power.

5 The Reign of God

Jesus' good news was declared as the beginning of the reign of God (2: 14). His reference to "reign of God" has an extremely political nuance. It is not only political, but is declared as having already begun. The tense (present perfect) implies its immediacy as well. Now we ask,

Did Jesus map out concrete political strategies to cope with the Roman colonial power, the regionally stationed power represented by the governor, or the temple-centered domestic political power? It seems not totally true. If he was interested in upheaval of the state or Empire, there were political or social elements that he could have paid more attention to. At glance we may say he was not so interested in drastic change of the Roman regime. We could see the reason in the following:

1) He did not fight against the slavery system. In the Gospel of Mark there is no concrete idea that leads to the emancipation of slaves. The number of slaves in his day was enormous and second to that of the army. To be a slave is not something rare, and in fact is common enough that the concept was even used as a metaphor for expressing the ethics of what it means to be in the faith community of the Jesus movement.¹¹

2) We never see Jesus developing a political strategy that deals with the military power over the crowd. Military used to be a) "the dominant face of Roman power in Palestine and b) enforcers of stability and order, involved in local government to the lowest level and, when necessary, in suppression of social order." ¹²

According to Hobbs, "Within a few decades, the legionaries and the unknown number of auxiliary militia in the region had become the face of the empire that most of the inhabitants saw and experienced." ¹³ It may be plausible to say that the people following Jesus' movement were ordinarily surrounded by the stationed military. In contrast, the Roman military force only implicitly appears in the story of the demoniac in Gerasene, to which we will return later.¹⁴

The majority of Galilee's population was peasants, the crowd and they were deprived under much hardship granted by the Roman power. They had to struggle for daily survival and such living conditions could produce their passive or indifferent attitude toward politics. They were anonymous in the society except being the objects for taxation and oppression. They could not help but be indifferent to a transformation of the social structure or political system. Instead they saw the increase of the Roman army because of the peripheral location of Israel in the Empire. The peasants had to struggle

with their exploitation on a daily basis.¹⁵

Observing such life struggles of the peasants, we have to wonder what Jesus actually meant by the “reign of God.” Should it replace the Roman imperial rule?

6 Healing Ministry: Exorcism

How real was “the reign of God” to Jesus when he claimed it at the beginning of his ministry? There were two concrete and main actions he took all through his ministry, 1) teaching and 2) healing (1:21-28 and many others). These were undoubtedly a distinctive sign of the breakthrough of “the reign of God.”

As soon as Jesus’ ministry was begun with these two distinctive actions, he could not evade the harsh criticism given by the religious authorities of Judea (scribes, chief priests and Pharisees). It never disappeared until his death. (from 2:7, 16 to 14:64) Among the stories of Jesus’ healing ministry, those on exorcism draw our special attention as they appear most frequently in the Gospel (1:23-26, 32-34; 3:22-30; 5:1-20; 6:7, 13; 7:24-30; 9:14-29; 3:11-12, 14-15, etc.).

We may construe it as the ministry of retrieving those who found themselves caught and controlled by demons to “the reign of God.” How is the demon possessed situation related to the experience of the “reign of God”?

The relation of the healing ministry with the reign of God becomes clearer when we look into two of the exorcism stories; 1) Beelzebul discourse (3:22-30) and 2) the story of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-17).

Both stories make it apparent that the religious authorities felt threatened because they conceived the exorcism as challenging the status quo.¹⁶

Despite the fact that Jesus was killed by the Roman power, the Empire did not seem to take Jesus’ ministry as threatening its political or social situation. Rather Jesus seemed to challenge Judean religious authorities that executed temple-centered politics under the colonial-occupation of the Empire. We see a typical example of his critical challenge in the story of the Beelzebul discourse. In Mark, Jesus does not interact with the political power of the Empire or its deputy in Judea until the end of his life. Even then Pilate shows his ambivalent attitude to the proceedings of the trial (15:1-15).¹⁷ Is it really what happened in the history? What could be hidden behind the text by Mark? What did Jesus actually challenge? The religious authority and the regional rulers only? We need to scrutinize the two stories the questions in mind.

(1) Beelzebul discourse (3:22-27)

Central to this discourse is the negative “labeling” of Jesus by the religious authorities. “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons” (3:22). According to Santiago

Guijarro, by branding Jesus with the name of Beelzebul, they gave him a visible sign showing him as deviant from and inferior to the ordinary people. Their point was in putting Jesus outside of their social standard and getting rid of their own threatened feeling. By transferring him into a deviant group, they also hoped to get a public sanction that Jesus is to be alienated.¹⁸

Guijarro continues and raises the following questions, “ The scenario suggested here has a heuristic value, (underline is mine) because it helps ask new questions: Why were the exorcisms of Jesus so important and dangerous for his accusers? Who were the accusers? What social values or boundaries were violated in casting out demons? ” ¹⁹

Let ’ s pick up the questions he raised with the heuristic value of societal, negative labeling. He responds to the question by introducing Paul W. Hollenbach ’ s anthropological studies. According to Hollenbach, there is “ a close relationship between demon possession and social tensions,...such as ‘ class antagonisms rooted in economic exploitation, conflicts between traditions where revered this is not copied accurately, is it? traditions are eroded, colonial domination and revolution. ’ ” ²⁰ By calling/ naming Jesus Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, the religious authorities designate him as part of the deviant and the abnormal. It is clear now that the religious power tried to marginalize Jesus and put him out of their territory by branding him with a negative identity. He could become an outcast of Judea.²¹

Guajarro further leads the discussion following Hollenach, saying that “ mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from oppressions, ” and “ some types of mental disorders became... ‘ cures ’ for, as well as symptoms of social conflict.... It may have functioned as a ‘ fix ’ for people who saw no other way to cope with the horrendous social and political conditions in which they found their lot cast. ” ²²

It is plausible to conceive that those who were completely deprived of speaking or acting under extremely severe oppression may find their way of expressing the predicament in becoming out of their mind or showing unordinary physical reactions. Guijarro even mentions, “ There is in view here economic disprivilege, malnutrition, endemic violence, and the destruction of rural families. ” ²³

If we construe the exorcism by Jesus as the beginning of the reign of God, we see its important role in the sense that the voice that were oppressed, silenced and ignored begin to be heard. Then it naturally threatens the power in need of keeping their status quo as well as their integrity. _What Jesus did by exorcism is to regain the wholeness and human rights of those who lost them under horrendously stressful lives. Therefore the work cannot be without destructive influence upon the social structure that has kept its peace at the expense of such people. As a result, fear occurred even among the people (3 :21; 5:17).

Now let ’ s glance at Jesus ’ response to the scribes, which has heavily political overtones. He

repeats three times how meaningless it is to be in conflict and divided, through using the cases of a kingdom, a house, and the demon group. How can he be the head of the demons, if he exorcises demons? By doing so, he gave severe criticism against the political elites of Judea who intended to marginalize and silence Jesus by labeling him as an outcast of the hierarchical structure of the society.

We may conclude that exorcism reveals a subversive and reconstructive implication of his reign of God ministry.

Jesus, in fact, talked about this activity with his disciples as though it were normal. They were sent by him to cast out demons and make a success in the ministry. “ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits...They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them ” (Mk 6:7, 13).

It seems plausible to say that for Jesus, exorcism was not only one of the primary activities for inducing the reign of God, but also it characterizes the ministry of his community of faith. What Jesus did by exorcism is to regain the wholeness and human rights of those who lost them under horrendously stressful lives. Therefore the work cannot be without destructive influence upon the social structure that has kept its peace at the expense of such people. As a natural result, fear occurred among the people (3:21; 5:17).

While the political power conceived exorcism as threatening, Jesus saw it as a sign of the reign of God. He negated their way of understanding exorcism and the social label given, since it was done to benefit the powerful. It is now obvious that the exorcisms of Jesus had political consequences which directly influenced the hierarchical structure of the society.

Guajirro who used “ the social studies of deviant behavior as a cognitive and heuristic tool for interpreting the deviance process of Jesus, ” says it helps “ clarify in which sense Jesus was considered a ‘ marginal ’ person....The historical causes and consequences of Jesus ’ deviant activity appear more clearly. ”²⁴ Accusing Jesus as being in solidarity with Beelzebul, the authorities had hidden agenda of categorizing him as one of the outsiders of the society and getting public sanction that his ministry is not valid. Thus he is assigned a new identity. We may claim it as “ more concrete contextualization of his exorcisms. ”²⁵

Where being demon-possessed is conceived as a way of escaping from severe oppression, the act of healing the demon-possessed causes the hierarchically structured society to become unstable. So it is very persuasive for Guajirro to say, “ The puzzling reaction to his exorcisms from his own family, as well as from the people, the scribes and Herod Antipas, suggests that the social reintegration of demoniacs had social and political connotations for Jesus and for his contemporaries that are opaque to us. ”²⁶ We may conclude that the beginning of the reign of God is to be found in the restoration of the demon-possessed and the marginalized. Now let ’ s look at the next story.

(2) 5:1-17 Story of the Gerasene demoniac:
Destruction of a herd of swine and healing of the demon possessed person²⁷

The story is the first exorcism story by Mark with significant detail. “ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes ” (5:1).²⁸ Gerasa is one of the big Hellenistic cities that prospered through their commerce. The root of the Hebrew word Gerasa, gr_ means “ demolish, expel, etc. ” The sentence implies the exorcist Jesus has come to the land that needs exorcism. The Roman legions stayed in the region to keep peace with the relative autonomy granted to the region. It is widely known that there were Jews who resided in the region. Such circumstances may be enough for us to suspect that the story has some rhetorical implications of tensions between the people in the region and the Roman legions. In addition, the tension between the Jews in Palestine and the colonial dominion of Rome may also be implicit.

The reality of such exploitation becomes clearer when the demon replies, “ My name is Legion; for we are many. ” The name reveals the striking situation in which the man has been placed, because the term “ legion ” apparently stands for the Roman military that stationed in the regions of the Decapolis.²⁹ Stephen D. Moore, who did postcolonial reading of the story, points out the voice made by the demon had dual reference to demonic possession and colonial occupation. And he uses this dual reference as a “ hermeneutical key. ”³⁰

When we hear them say next, “ Send us into the swine; let us enter them, ” (5:10) it becomes the most apparent that the legion signifies the Romans. Most Jews avoid swine as unclean and not to be eaten (cf. Lev 11:7-8; Dt 14:8; Is 65:4., etc.). Sometimes swine is used as a metaphor for foreigners. To have a herd of swine nearby or to raise them should be foreign to the Jews. Why did the unclean spirits, the legion beg Jesus to send them into swine?

The demoniac, a man with unclean spirits has been living among the tombs, the space of the dead. He is physically isolated from his family, pushed to the farthest margin of the community, and considered unclean and socially alienated as “ other. ” Though he is alive, he is treated like one of the dead. He symbolizes the outcast of the society. His abnormal behavior can be interpreted as an expression of fighting against harsh circumstances that appear to him difficult to adjust to or accept. When the exploitive power is overwhelming, a person may express her/his resistance through losing their voice or going mad. This kind of resistance can only cause self-annihilation. The person is called by the name of the sickness and subjectively is too internalized to speak out. It is only the demons that speak for the person.

We may also discern in his mind which is colonized by the demons, the collective anxiety of a community over social, political, economic, or religious oppression. A subjugated community may repress its anguish and turn in on itself. It may be probable to say so, when we see the story describe

how tightly and chokingly the demons put the man under their control. “ He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones ” (5:3-5). The story seems surely dealing with issues of land, invasion, occupation, and liberation. There is a parallel situation between Gerasa and many regions of the globe under occupation of present day ’ s economic imperialism/colonialism. Jesus ’ exorcism can be read as a politically public symbolic action. Then we may say the story reflects the reality of the severe exploitation which makes people unable to live decent lives as humans.

However, Jesus spoke not to the man, but only to the unclean spirits and demons, “ Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. ” It is apparent that Jesus focuses his mind on the unclean spirits: the cause of the man ’ s sickness. The unclean spirits take the center of attention after the detailed description of the man ’ s wild behavior.

But the unclean spirits begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. For this begging was a reason. The Roman legion can accomplish its mission only through staying in the assigned region. If it were expelled of the region, it becomes worthless. This is the reason the unclean spirits begged Jesus earnestly. Thus we discern Jesus ’ exorcism revealing his severe anti-colonial and critical attitude against the power of the Roman Empire. Criticism against the legion representing the Roman Empire is also the expression of the resistance against its colonial rule. It is very plausible for Jesus to express his strategy against the Roman Empire implicitly and indirectly as this, though we may say it can be also Markan strategy when he edits his gospel.

The “ strong man ” in the story of Beelzebub discourse (3:23-27 cf. “ But no one can enter a strong man ’ s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered ”) may imply the power that exploits and deprives. Unclean spirits are used as a tool of the Empire. The person possessed by unclean spirits is under their full control so that he loses his self-direction and identity as a subject. Unclean spirits rule him and they speak through and for him. It may also be said that he was forced to internalize the dominant oppression by the colonizing rulers. As result, he was self-alienated until he becomes a fully colonized subject. Under occupation, he loses his normality and gets mad. He is called only by his sickness and his subjectivity is hidden away. Against their desire, the unclean spirits, the legion, were driven out with the swine that were drowned in the sea. The story continues, “ The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ” It shows how astonished as well as shocked the swineherds were. They are subcontractors hired by the owners of the herd. They will surely lose their ability to earn their bread. They may be accused by their employers for the loss of their property. The owners, who belong to a higher level of economic and social status in society than the swineherds, will not be happy to hear what happened. Their comparatively stable life will drastically be damaged.

The owners of the swine typically show that there are those who benefit from their society even when it

is under the colonial rule. The existence of the legion has been the guarantee of a secure life for some strata of the people in the society; more so, if they supply food to the Romans stationed in their region. To keep the status quo is not necessarily something hateful for everybody, especially for the powerful elite, even though this means living under the oppressive control of the Empire.

The story seems to implicitly insist that removal of the Roman colonial control is imperative for the demoniac/the outcast of the society to be liberated. However, if the legion is removed, this will possibly bring not only unstable social conditions but also critical political situations. The whole structure of the society will be involved. Therefore the story continues, “ They began to beg him to leave their neighborhood ” (v. 19). The gentle begging reveals their ambivalent feeling that although they may desire the demise of the legion, the Roman rule, they do not desire to receive the damage caused by the social change which would result as a consequence of the removal. Their only interest is in keeping their economic gain at the expense of “ others. ”

Who is the man, then, with the unclean spirits? Is he a Jew or a foreigner? Since the Jews also lived in the region, he could be a Jew. Gerd Theissen thinks he is a foreigner because the Jews regarded swine as disgusting.³¹ If he is a foreigner, we may say the story commemorates the beginning of the healing of and mission to foreigners by Jesus. In either case, I take the story as reflective of the torment, suffering, and pain caused by the Roman oppression and antipathy toward the Empire of the Jewish people, especially those who are made ‘ others, ’ the crowd in the society by the rulers. It is quite plausible to read the story as being critical of the hegemony of imperialism/colonialism. It is a hidden story of the ardent desire of the alienated in society for a drastic transformation.

For the purpose of reading Jesus ’ exorcisms as standing on the side of the victims under the Roman oppression and retrieving their wholeness as human beings, we need to focus on the point that his exorcism is a symbolic political action to subvert the oppressive occupation. Under the reality of being colonized, it is always dangerous to explicitly talk about subversion. That may be the reason why the story is told in the setting of Gerasa, a foreign region. Then there is more probability that the man is a Jew.

The man healed was asked by Jesus to go home to his friends, even though he wanted to be with Jesus (5:15). It is not unusual for Jesus to ask the healed persons to go back to their original communities. For the alienated ones that are labeled “ others ” by their communities and that have been cut off from ordinary human relationships, it is most important to be re-integrated into their original communities. Following the Markan redaction, the story tells that “ he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed. ” However, the focus of the story is not on Jesus ’ foreign mission, but on the liberation of the “ others, ” the crowd outside the social class strata in the community. Here in this story exorcism is seen as one of Jesus ’ primary ministries for realizing the reign of God.

We may say Jesus' exorcism signifies political action in the guise of healing in its rhetorical meaning. Thus he challenged the military control of Rome and symbolically destroyed the imperial domination of the Empire. The control was most severe to the people who were located at the bottom of the ladder of the social classes. The man with an unclean spirits/demons symbolizes the destitute situation of such people. They have little benefit out of the social status system, as they can easily be victimized at the will of those above them. The destruction of the herd has brought serious economic damage to those who enjoyed them as a source of food and thus benefited even under the imperial control. They exemplify those who are always exposed to the danger of losing their economic resources to sustain their lives in a hierarchical society. Jesus took the side of the expendables at the expense of the benefited minority, which would cause a great deal of social instability. The destruction of the swine affected the maintenance of rites and rituals of religions. It implies even the religions cannot stay neutral to political, economic and social turbulences in the society. The ethnic tension between the Jews and the Romans might also be present as undercurrent. It is always covert when the colonized are so subjugated that they do not have the effective means to overcome the situation.

Voiceless voices are heard through the demon-possessed as they lost their voices through being triply victimized under the colonial rule of the Roman Empire, the Judean governor of Pilate who flatters the Empire, and the temple-centered politics of Judea.

Subversive implications told through the Gerasene exorcising/cleansing are materialized through Jesus' marching to Jerusalem (10:32-34), entry into the temple (11:1-11), and its cleansing (11:15-19). However, these consecutive actions symbolize only the destruction of the power held by the religious authorities of Judea, the regional rulers. Jesus' actions are seen as threatening by the Jerusalem elites (11:17). His actions do not seem to describe the destruction of the Roman Empire, which is a cleansing that the exorcism at Gerasene actually anticipated.

The symbolic destruction of the temple by Jesus precipitates his own destruction, his public annihilation on the colonial cross. However, we do not see the overt hostility to the Roman Empire expressed in Mark's stories. Even in the eschatological prophecy recorded in chapter 13, we read "and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (13:13). Even in this statement it is hard to see the chapter predicting a thoroughgoing extermination of Judea by Rome. It is only in 15:1-39 when the Roman power explicitly appears. At Jesus' trial before the Roman prefect of Judea and the public execution at the hands of the Roman military, the two rulers representing Rome show their ambivalent feelings toward Jesus.

- 1) The governor Pilate seems to be trying to excuse Jesus from the hanging on the cross (15:1-15).
- 2) The Judean local officer, a Centurion who stood facing Jesus, saw when he breathed his last and said, "Truly this man was God's son" (15:39). His words are ambivalent about whether he understood what the disciples failed to grasp or he simply expressed ridicule just like others (15:29-32).

In Mark, it is only once that Jesus explicitly spoke about Rome: “ Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor ’ s, and to your god the things that are your god ’ s. ” (12:17) The statement cannot be considered challenging and negating the status quo of the Empire.

Here I agree with Moore ’ s reading which says, “ Mark ’ s anti-imperial criticism that did not go beyond the local elites is more plausible to take Jesus announcing the divine destruction and annihilation (7:9-13; 11:12-21; 12:38-44) toward the power of the temple-centered politics that exploits the people. Even then there are exceptional ones referred in Mark; Jairus(5:22f), a scribe(12:28-34), and Joseph of Arimathea(15:42-46). ” Keeping in mind what we have found in the story of the Gerasene, we cannot help but wonder if this is all that we can see. The words and behaviors suggested in the story that implicitly negate, challenge and subvert the Roman rule are never repeated or explicitly told in the other parts of the Gospel. Is it due to Markan redactional intention? Agreeing with what Moore said, I have to argue that Mark had his hidden agenda in his Gospel. It may be his limit that he could only talk implicitly. It may be because he felt dangerous for himself as well as for his community of faith. It is not possible to make it clear the reason he hid the message, but we cannot also ignore the vestiges of his efforts. How the resistance against the Roman rule shown by Mark in his limits should have been actualized? The question has remained unanswered.

If we read that Jesus did intend to overthrow the imperial rule of the Roman Empire, now we have to go back to our primary question, “ What does Jesus mean by ‘ reign of God ’ in Mark? ”

7 Life under the Reign of God

Jesus repeatedly teaches his followers, the crowd not to be attached to authority, glory, power and fortune (9:33-37; 10:17-31, 35-44; cf. 12:41-44), but he referred to child (paidion), servant (diakonos) and even slave (doulos) (9:35-37; 10:13-16, 42-45; cf. 13:34) as the model to be followed. The concept implies that those who participate in the rule of the Empire and benefit from it are the most distant from the reign of God.

I agree with what Moore says in the following; Mark “ seems reticent about unequivocally promising eschatological power and glory to disciples who successfully imitate Jesus ’ practice of embracing a self-abnegating way of life fraught with the risk of violent death: Jesus readily promises the suffering (“ The cup that I drink you will drink ”), but is noticeably evasive on the matter of the reward (“ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant ” 10 : 39-40). ”

However, I argue that Mark may be trying to reveal an omen of the end of divinization of the Roman Empire in such a circumstance that absolutely puts him in danger even to express the expectation of its extinction. Putting the reward somewhere beyond this world seems to completely ruin the value of the community ethic based on equality and selfless love. He may have to show in his limits what ethics

the community of faith should bear in the current world. Retrieving the wholeness of the demon-possessed is what the community of his followers seems obliged to pursue and create a completely new community welcoming the most alienated through listening to the voices of the most discriminated against so that all may become fully human. I wonder whether Jesus means that the community of faith has in and of itself the reward it should receive?

I would again quote Moore here to proceed to the next step, “ A radical ethic that shatters every previously imaginable social structure is, in its own way, also radically apocalyptic, portending the end of the world as we know it. Mark ’ s apocalyptic discourse (13:1-37) does not, however, portend the end of the Roman imperial order, but rather its apotheosis. ” It may be Mark ’ s understanding that the struggle against the colonial and dominant power of the Roman Empire cannot end with Jesus hung on the cross.

We are now ready to see new apocalyptic ethics which may not bring the end of the Empire, but may challenge and resist against it. I would like to look into two stories on women who appear toward the end of Jesus ’ life and embody the ethic that Jesus might hope his community of faith could live out so that they may experience the reign of God here and now.

(1) The story of the widow in 12:41-44

First, we deal with the story of the widow who devoted all of her life to the temple. Her story in 12:41-44 has been interpreted as an exemplary model that Jesus lauded. However, in the context of negating the temple and its greedy authorities, there is no meaning for applauding her behavior. Some others interpret the story as showing her absolute self-giving dramatically prefiguring Jesus ’ own self-emptying in death. It might be true that Jesus, watching the scene at the temple, perceived the multi-layered structures of exploitation and the hypocritical, spiteful ways of wringing the poor, the crowd, and the outcasts. The powerful shrewdly built up the system so that they might keep the status quo at the expense of the powerless. It is not easy to subvert the system built firmly and governed by a patriarchal/kyriarchal mind-set. Jesus might have felt his own fate was to be hung on the cross.

Moore suggests that “ the woman is read as epitomizing instead the oppressed peasantry mercilessly bled dry by the indigenous, Rome-allied elites. ” This interpretation fits well to the context of our current interest. I see the widow as being victimized by the religious authorities that taught her to pour out all of her life to the temple. She shows how greedy and corrupt the religious authorities are. It is she that should be assisted, but instead she is silenced and almost coerced to pour out her whole livelihood. She does not seem to know how to resist against the injustice done to her. In this sense we see similarities in her life and that of the Gerasene demon-possessed person. She also needs someone to speak up for her. Jesus was indignant at the power behind her, but did not act for her. She is left alone. She symbolizes the most victimized and forgotten in society. She symbolizes the poor farmers suffering from deprivation in Galilee.

If we take this interpretation, we can smoothly move into the apocalyptic chapter 13. Jesus' harsh criticism of the temple in 13:2 (" Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another, all will be thrown down ") is more understandable if we think of the grandeur that symbolizes the hypocritical power that was wielded upon the victimized, the weak, and the poor. Therefore the destruction of the temple cannot be avoided.

The story of the widow touches the issue of the value system that governs not only the economy and politics, but also religion. The story is asking the whole system to be totally deconstructed, subverted and changed. It also reveals the seriousness of the problem which cannot be totally solved even by the life-divestment of Jesus. Then we realize that we are asked to interpret his divestment of life as only suggesting the community of his followers keep challenging the issue. It implies that the issue is such that even Jesus' life divestment could not settle. His action should probably be interpreted as a model to be followed by the community of faith. However, this interpretation can only result in increasing the suffering of the people in destitute as is written " For in those days there will be suffering such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be " (13:19). It does not liberate the crowd, the poor.

Moore proposes the basic ethic for the community of faith should be the love that does not expect the reciprocal or interactional exchange of anything. It is the full divestment of the self. It surely deconstructs the world as we know it, but the question remains: that is whether we can say such a radical ethic could ever be practical. Yet it is still challenging to our question of what kind of ethic a community of faith should hold.

(2) Story of the Anointing Woman (14:3-9)

Soon after the models of economic exchange are deftly deconstructed, the chief priests and the scribes begin looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth (14:1) and the story of the anointing woman follows in 14:3-9.

At first glance our attention is drawn to " Simon the leper " in whose house the anointing took place. Now Jesus is in his house for a meal with Simon's friends. It is not difficult to see the people participating in the table fellowship are those who are called " crowd " in Mark.

As the woman anointed Jesus with the extravagantly expensive oil, " some were there who said to one another in anger, ' Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denari, and the money given to the poor ' " (14:4-5). What the woman did must have shocked those who were struggling for daily life under the exploitation. They suffer especially from the economic gap between the rich and the crowd (poor and powerless).

The anger and criticism they showed must be their honest reaction. The story tells that what she did prepared Jesus who would soon die on the cross. In that sense her action has prophetic meaning. She prepared him for his death by anointing him as a king/ruler.

Her self-abnegating behavior and love was far beyond their understanding. They showed they could think only in the framework of their value system which was made up and made use of by the power to keep the status quo. The people were also victimized and blinded so that they could not see beyond what they saw in front of them. They could not see the serious issues that have led them to such economic exploitation.

The heuristic key for this story is found in Jesus' words in 14:7 (" For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not have me. ") The statement suggests that his death is near, but the problems with which they suffer will not be settled by his death.

Needless to say, landlordism, money lending, and slavery inevitably result in maldistribution of resources. Jesus is pressing for a revolutionary and collective conversion that calls for new social relationships between the haves and have-nots. However, the deconstruction of the hierarchical and patriarchal society and reconstruction of a new society asks more than the life of Jesus. His followers are being asked whether they are ready to commit themselves to the social reconstruction project for which Jesus is going to die. In this sense, his saying is not a harmless and socially undisturbing comment. He is entrusting the big project to the community of his followers and challenging them to continue their resistance against the overwhelming political/religious power. The struggle will have to continue.

The most pressing challenge is to regain the wholeness of the people through exorcism. The followers of Jesus' movement experienced exorcism (6: 12- 13 " So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. "). Bringing back the oppressed from their extremely inhumane situations of being maddened, silenced, out-of-mind to the community of faith is challenging to the power. We may say what Jesus intended was the political/religious economics that is supported and activated by the crowd, the grassroots people. Jesus' followers, the crowd, are expected to stir up the collective power of citizenry to challenge the power of patriarchy/kyriarchy. In other words, it is an awakening call for the power of the " crowd " or ordinary citizens, which will eventually undermine the powers that be.

8 Ethics of the Crowd under the Reign of God

Though the behaviors of the two women are quite different, they are powerfully speaking in silence that the basis of the ethics of a community of faith or a church is to be found in the self-devotional love that

empowers the members of the community to engage in retrieving the “ demon-possessed ” persons to their wholeness and expanding the boundary of the community. This ethic seems to lead us to actualize the reign of God here and now. Thus, we experience the reign of God in the community.

Mark records statements as Jesus ’ teaching that are resonant with the stories we have read in the above. They are such as ” For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it ” (8:34-39), “ Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all ” (9:33-37) and ” whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all ” (10:42-45).

In this context we should remember the story of the scribe who impressed Jesus and led him saying, “ You are not far from the reign of God ” (12: 28- 34). The scribe fully concurred with Jesus ’ teaching of the greatest commandments: “ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength and You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ” The reign of God is realized only when such love is fluent among the people of the community.

Another exceptional person is found toward the end of the gospel. He is “ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the reign of God ” (15: 42-46). These two Jews with social position and honor may be resonant with Jesus declaring the beginning of the reign of God, but Mark may have an hidden intention to lesson antagonism of the Jews. Jesus was killed by the antagonism of the power because of such love he lived out. .

Only through such commitment of selfless love, did Jesus hope to show that it becomes possible for us to avoid economic discrimination or political conflicts? The church has not apparently been able to conceive his hope in its fullness. Does such love remain as impossible for us to live out?

9 Conclusion

Contrary to our expectation, Jesus ’ idea of “ the reign of God ” is not something to replace the imperial rule of Roman Empire, much less the subversion of the Roman political regime. At the same time, we need to take notes on the fact that it might be Mark who restrained harsh criticism and challenge against the colonial rule of the Roman Empire as well as the temple-centered rule of Judean regime. He might be under pressure that forced him not to write Jesus ’ life as it really was. If it were so, we need to have sensitivity as well as imaginative mind to discern how overwhelming was the power of the Empire.

Jesus in Mark seems to be more interested in birthing communities of faith, in which he has conceived the beginning of the reign of God. The primary mission of the community of faith is found in retrieving the demon-possessed persons who lost their voices, normalcy and identity under severe oppression.

They, in their abnormality and madness that is interpreted as being under demons' control, have raised their unheard appeal or suppressed cry of survival.

By regaining their wholeness as humans and being recognized and identified as citizens in the faith community, the demon-possessed recover from their sickness. With his followers, Jesus engaged in a grassroots movement challenging the status quo and exposed how distorted was the temple-centered structure of Judean politics and religion. His grassroots economics resulted in threatening the power that clings on to gain their own benefits at the expense of the crowd.

Such "reign of God" economics must still be efficient in the contemporary churches since we have not seen the reign of God in its fullness. Why are churches so weak/reticent to retrieve the powerless and regain their human rights? Where have churches lost their sight to see what is the real reign of God proclaimed by Jesus? We are still in dire need of asking what we can do for bringing in the reign of God here and now.

Notes

1) 4:1-20, 4:25, 6:3, 6 : 7-11, 6:32-44, 8:1-10, 8:36, 10:17-22, 10:23-27, 10:28-31, 10:42-45, 11:15-19, 12:1-12, 12:13-17, 12:38-44, 13:33-37, 14:3-9, 14:10-11.

2) 2:4,13; 3:9,20,32; 4:1(twice),36; 5:21,24,27,30,31; 6:34,45; 7:14,17,25,33; 8:1,2,34; 9:14,15,17,27; 10:1,46; 12:12,37,41

There are cases in which verbs imply the ochlos 1:22,30,32,44; 2:3,32

(polloi) 2:2,15; 4:33; 10:31,45; 11:8; 14:24, (plethos polu) 3:8, (pas) 9:35; 10:44; 13:37

3) Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 73.

4) Ibid., 99.

5) Douglas E. Oakman, "Money in the Moral Universe of the New Testament," *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* eds. Wolfgang Stegemann, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 337.

6) Ibid., 339-340, 342. He attested that coins had an important role in politics and economy for the rulers to show their power and to keep the status quo. Peasants usually use the barter system for their commerce. For example, Philip (tetrarch) "issuing coins served to publicize the legitimacy of Philip's own authority in the face of foreign domination ...to show Philip's loyalty to Rome as a faithful client ruler." 336.

7) Ibid., 343. Cf. Marketplaces (agora 12:38, 6:56) developed somewhat in Roman-period cities and perhaps in towns, but no moneyed relations are in view.

The irony and exasperation, and improbability may be as much the point as the presumption of widespread market-relations in 6:36(Oakman342).

There are several cases in which Jesus gave radical critique of money (ploutos in 4:19: the lure of wealth,thesauros in 10:21: treasure in heaven,ktema in 10:22: many possessions.

8) T. Raymond Hobbs, "The political Jesus: Discipleship and Disengagement," *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* eds. Wolfgang Stegemann et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 265.

9) Oakman, 347.

10) Ibid., 347.

11) T. Raymond Hobbs, "The Political Jesus: Discipleship and Disengagement," *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* eds., Wolfgang Stegemann and et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 265.

12) Ibid., 266.

13) Ibid., 251.

14) Ibid., 255f, According to him, "Palestine, because of the nature of its geography, and its position at the "distant periphery" of the Roman Empire, constituted one of its most porous borders. But, precisely because of this fact, the military presence in the region was massive. Its presence had grown since the first occupation, and it is estimated that, by the middle of the second century, more than one-third of the Roman Army was stationed in the Roman Near East."

15) Hobbs, Ibid., 257.

16) According to Malbon, "The Jewish and Roman authorities portray the difficulty of dealing with Jesus' challenges on a societal level; challenges of the status quo must not expect to be heralded by those with the most to gain by protecting the status quo." Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology (Baylor University Press, 2009), 127.

17) Hobbs, 264.

18) Santiago Guajarro, "The Politics of Exorcism," The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels eds. Wolfgang Stegemann et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 162-63. (According to Guajarro, "Being labeled a deviant means not only being accused as a rule breaker, but receiving a deviant ontological status, which tends to make a person an outsider and to exile that person from the group." Labeling takes place when the authorities feel threatened and try to keep their status quo. He continues, "By accusing Jesus, his accusers try to assign him a new identity, a new self of a negative kind. They do this in order to neutralize his activity. Jesus' activity is perceived as negative, either dangerous for society as a whole or for the group that initiated the deviance process.")

19) Ibid., 164.

20) Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities. A Socio-Historical Study," JAAR, 49: 561-88, 1981, 573. quoted in Guajarro, 165.

21) Cf. Guajarro, 171.

22) Hollenbach, 576.

23) Guajarro, 166.

24) Guajarro, 171,

25) Ibid., 172.

26) Ibid., 172.

27) Hisako Kinukawa, "Mark," in Global Bible Commentary. ed. Daniel Patte (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2004), 367-378.

28) The term Gerasene's Hebrew root gr_ means to banish, drive out, and cast out. Gerasene is "a big Hellenistic city which prospered through commerce and is located in the region of Decapolis. From the Jewish point of view, it is of the unclean gentiles." (Migaku Sato, 21)

"Jesus, the exorcist, came to the land that badly needed his exorcising." Stephen D Moore, "Markan Empire: 'Zealot' and 'Postcolonial' Readings," 137.

29) Usually a legion consists of 5,000 to 6,000 infantry, 120 cavalry, and associated auxiliaries. The existence of legions can be very threatening, especially if their control is strong and exploiting to the people. It may be plausible to say the situation in Palestine is covertly expressed in the guise of the foreign setting.

30) Moore, 135.

31) Gerd Theissen, The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 110.

(Hisako Kinukawa and Shannon Clarkson collaborated in the translation of this issue.)