

Wealth and Sacrifice in Early Christianity: Revisiting Mark's Presentation of Jesus' Encounter with the Rich Young Ruler

Hellerman, Joseph H.

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I have always been rather troubled by both popular and serious treatments of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-22. Our interpretations of this challenging text appear to be strongly influenced by our own theological traditions and the social world in which we live, rather than by a sensitivity to ancient Mediterranean economic and cultural realities, and to the narrative context of the passage itself.

The pericope begins with a man falling before Jesus and asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). W. Wessel suggests that

[The rich man] was thinking in terms of Jewish works of righteousness. He wanted to do something to merit eternal life, whereas Jesus taught that eternal life (the kingdom of God) is a gift to be received (cf. v. 15).¹

The dialogue which follows, however, points in a different direction entirely. Jesus responds to the rich young ruler (hereafter, RYR) with six socio-ethical commandments from the Decalogue. Then he confronts the man with a challenge which finds no parallel in the Hebrew Scriptures.² Nowhere does Mark 10:17-31 even hint that Jesus had a problem with the RYR's desire to do something to inherit eternal life.³

C. E. B. Cranfield seeks to resolve the conflict between Jesus' command and the doctrine of justification by faith as follows:

[Mark 10:21] does not mean that selling one's goods and giving the proceeds to the poor is a meritorious act that will earn treasure in heaven; for the reward is God's undeserved gift to those who are willing to receive it. But trust, willingness to accept God's gift as a gift, cannot help but show itself by outward tokens. Jesus by commanding the man to show the tokens which are the outward expression of faith is really appealing to him to have faith.⁴

Such a reading finds no direct support in the passage under consideration. One must import teaching from elsewhere in the NT in order to convincingly argue as Cranfield does. Moreover, reframing Jesus' directive to the RYR as an appeal "to have faith" only moves the problem to another level. All would-be followers must have faith in Jesus. The obvious question, then, is, must all would-be followers divest themselves of their belongings in order to follow Jesus?

This points to a second troubling aspect of many interpretations of Mark 10:17-22. Western scholars almost invariably read Jesus' troubling command to the RYR through the distorting lens of Western individualism. As a result, the emphasized question, which ends the previous paragraph, is answered with a resounding "No!": "The counsel to sell all is given to a particular person: we are not to conclude that it applies equally to all."⁵ Dissenting voices are quickly silenced. T. E. Schmidt persuasively argues against limiting Jesus' command to the rich man at hand. R. Gundry, however, summarily rejects Schmidt's arguments, concluding, with the majority, that Jesus' "demands differed from one person to another."⁶

Perhaps Protestant consensus is correct on this one. Maybe Jesus does implicitly teach Pauline theology in his interaction with the RYR. And maybe the commandment of v. 21 represents a challenge suitable only for the individual in question. The fact that these two assertions find no direct support in the text itself, however, leaves me less than convinced. And the fact that they preserve both our Protestant theological traditions and our opulent Western lifestyle causes me to suspect that our interpretations of the pericope have been socially constructed by a worldview influenced by popularized Reformation soteriology, radical individualism, and conspicuous consumption, rather than by ancient Palestinian (and early Christian) perspectives on economics.

The RYR pericope, of course, has nothing to say about the issue of faith versus works. To assert the contrary is to place the "cart" of systematic theology, as it were, before the "horse" of contextual exegesis. There is certainly a place for defending the common ground shared by Jesus (or Mark) and Paul. But exegesis must precede theology. Until we have a satisfying interpretation of Mark 10:17-21—one which gives full berth to the prophetic import of Jesus' teaching—we would do well to resist our temptations to prematurely harmonize the text with other passages of Scripture.

Nor does Mark 10:17-21 present a description of the demands of Jesus as they relate solely to a particular individual. Certainly, the RYR has allowed his wealth—and the elite privilege which his wealth symbolized in the highly stratified social world of ancient Palestine—to stand in the way of following Jesus. At one level, then, the directive to the RYR "was suited to his particular circumstances and state of mind."⁷ To limit ourselves to this individualized reading of Jesus' striking call to discipleship, however, is to miss out on the way in which the command was heard by the persons who observed the remarkable encounter firsthand. This, in turn, is to miss the central lesson of the text.

In the collectivist society of Mediterranean antiquity, individuals were viewed as representing the groups to which they belonged. Those listening to Jesus' dialogue with a rich man (singular) would immediately interpret his comments in terms of a class of people (plural)—the rich. Examples of this strong-group social outlook occur elsewhere in the NT. In John, for example, Nathanael asks his brother Philip, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (1:46). The author of Titus quotes a familiar proverb: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons" (1:12). For persons in collectivist, high-group antiquity, to know one Nazarene was to know them all; to know one Cretan was to know them all. And, returning to Mark 10, to see (or hear Jesus address) one rich man was to see (or hear Jesus address) them all. Jesus knows very well that his audience has interpreted his command to the RYR in more than individualistic terms. The RYR represents a larger group—the wealthy elite. What will Jesus have to say about this group?

Mark 10:23-27 pointedly answers that question, as Jesus applies the lesson to be learned from the individual encounter to the class of persons which the man represents Jesus of Nazareth has much to say about individual sin. But he also prophetically confronts institutional sin. Privileged Western interpreters are quick to notice the former. Jesus' critique of his contemporary socio-cultural institutions often escapes us, however, since our social location is so different from that of first-century Palestine. In the present case, T. Schmidt is certainly correct to find broader application of the radical call to discipleship (v. 21) right in the ensuing context (vv. 23-27) More than the attitude of a single individual is in view here—Jesus confronts institutionalized evil, as well?

A second consideration argues against limiting the application of Mark 10:21 to the RYR. Not only do vv. 23-27 expand the horizon from an individual (the RYR) to a group (the rich). In the discussion which follows, the disciples offer themselves as persons who have done precisely what Jesus asked of the RYR. Peter exclaims, in v. 28, "We have left everything to follow you!" As we shall discover below, Jesus seizes Peter's exclamation as an opportunity to teach his disciples about the role of wealth in the kingdom community (vv. 29-30) and, thus, by extension, to provide the reader with a contextually reliable reference point for understanding the significance of the command to the RYR back in v. 21. Mark 10:21 and 10:28-31 must be read together.

A final reason not to limit Jesus' command to the rich man has to do with the similarity of v. 21 to other passages in Mark's gospel in which Jesus' call to discipleship carries with it significant economic

ramifications (cf. 1:16-20; 2:14). As B. Malina and R. Rohrbaugh observe, "The demand to sell what one possesses, if taken literally, is the demand to part with what was the dearest of all possible possessions to a Mediterranean: the family home and land."¹⁰ What Jesus required of the RYR was not significantly different from what he demanded of Simon, Andrew, James, and John (1:16-20), or of Levi (2:14).

A full appreciation of Jesus' radical statement to the RYR in v. 21 thus depends upon a historically and culturally nuanced interpretation of the verses which follow-Mark 10:23-31.¹¹ The balance of my treatment, therefore, will focus upon the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples in Mark 10:23-31 and the help which the passage provides in elucidating the role of wealth among believers in early Christianity.

I. MARK 10:23-27-WEALTH AND POVERTY IN AGRARIAN ANTIQUITY

After the RYR departs, Jesus exclaims to his disciples: "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (v. 23). The disciples were amazed (...) at his words. Jesus repeats the statement in abbreviated form (v. 24) and then draws upon the striking hyperbole of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. This results in even more astonishment If the rich cannot enter the kingdom, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 26).

Scholars correctly read the dialogue against the backdrop of "conventional wisdom which sees in wealth a sign of God's favor."¹² D. Hagner elaborates in his comments on the Matthean parallel:

[The disciples] shared the common view of the time that riches were a sign of God's blessing (together with the righteousness of the blessed; cf. Deut 28:1-14) and provided the possibility of both deeds of charity (almsgiving) and leisure for the study of Torah and the pursuit of righteousness. ¹³

Not only, however, did wealth provide the opportunity to pursue personal piety. Many assumed a much closer connection between riches and piety. Specifically, persons who possessed riches were wealthy because they were pious.

The idea that God favors the pious by bestowing material blessing, as well as physical health and safety, surfaces sporadically throughout the Bible. One of Job's comforters, Eliphaz, held tenaciously to such a perspective. "Consider now," he queries Job, "Who being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?" (Job 4:7). Elsewhere, Eliphaz asserts, "He [the wicked] ... will no longer be rich, and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the land" (15:29; cf. John 9:1-2 and Luke 13:1-5 for the assumption of a causal relationship between piety and material/physical blessing).

Another stream of opinion flowed, however, in the opposite direction of this conventional wisdom. Some traced excessive wealth to human greed rather than divine favor. A most prominent example is found in Jas 5:1-4:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you, and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.¹⁴

To understand the cultural context in which these two conflicting explanations of wealth (divine favor versus human greed) arose, we must embrace a set of economic realities much different from those with which we are familiar in the post-industrial West.

A. Contrasting Views on the Availability of Resources Anthropologists delineate two perspectives on the availability of goods and resources:

* Unlimited Good-An infinite amount of goods and resources is available to any member of society who is willing to work to acquire them.

* Limited Good-A finite amount of goods and resources is available to persons and groups in a given community.

The post-industrial West-especially the United States-is a society with a basic perception of unlimited good. First-century Palestinian residents, in contrast, understood goods and resources to be "finite in number and limited in quantity" (limited good).¹⁵

America's economic assumptions derive from our nation's history (I write as a United States citizen), and from the nature of our post-industrial economy. An expanding economy, epitomized in the ever-increasing value of the intangible "goods" traded on Wall Street, convinces us that there is no limit to what can be acquired by the industrious American individual. And our perspective of unlimited good can be traced back much further than post-World War II economic expansion. The first century of our nation's history unfolded with the expressed conviction that there was always more land available for anyone with enough courage and initiative to go west.

Like early European settlers in America, the persons who inhabited first-century Palestine viewed land as a primary good. But they recognized that there was a limited amount of landed wealth to be had. The truth of limited good was powerfully reinforced for first-century Palestinian Jews when they heard their sacred traditions repeated at home and in the synagogue. The Pentateuch emphatically portrays the land of Israel as a finite commodity, carefully delineated by recognizable geographical boundary markers on every side (Num 34:1-15). Tribal boundaries receive the same painstaking exposition (Joshua 15-19).

B. Differing Degrees of Concern About the Distribution of Resources

Along with different views about the availability of goods and resources come different economic concerns. The main question for agrarian societies relates not to the expansion of production. Rather, the pressing matter in pre-industrial, farming and herding communities surrounds the allocation of limited landed resources-thus the profound concern for the equitable distribution of land in the Hebrew Scriptures. The law made allowance for the limited availability of landed wealth in several ways. On the one hand, the land was to be apportioned fairly, according to need: "Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one" (Num 33:54). Second, priests and Levites were to receive no share in the land allotment. As scholars have noted, such an arrangement in effect prevented those with access to priestly power from utilizing that power to accumulate landed wealth at the expense of their fellow Israelites.¹⁶ A final safeguard against the abuse of land-grabbing is found in the regulations concerning the sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. Inevitably, some would gain land as a result of the misfortune of others. But all land was to be returned to the original owners (i.e., their families) every fiftieth year."

C. Contrasting Explanations of Wealth and Poverty

Societies which view the availability of resources differently (limited versus unlimited good) also tend to generate markedly different explanations for wealth and poverty at the individual level. An awareness of these cultural distinctions proves indispensable for properly contextualizing Jesus' critique of wealth (Mark 10) in its first-century setting. The following chart contrasts various explanations of wealth and poverty in modern America and Roman Palestine:

Beginning with our own cultural outlook, we note that Americans typically attribute the possession of wealth to (1) hard work, (2) good fortune, or both. Correspondingly, we explain poverty by pointing to (1) lack of initiative, or (2) lack of opportunity. In America there are always more economic resources to be acquired (unlimited good). Because of this, those who fail to acquire them simply lack initiative or self-discipline. Or, perhaps, they have been unlucky, or unfairly discriminated against.

Markedly different explanations of wealth are found in limited good societies. The extensive Pentateuchal legislation and concern about land apportionment assumes an important truth: in a limited good society, when one person (or group) has more, then someone else inevitably ends up with less. B. Malina elaborates upon this important conviction as follows:

Since all good exists in limited amounts which cannot be increased or expanded, it follows that an individual, alone or with his family, can improve his social position only at the expense of others. Hence any apparent relative improvement in someone's position with respect to any good in life is viewed as a threat to the entire community. Obviously, someone is being deprived and denied something that is his, whether he knows it or not.¹⁸

What is patently clear is that during the days of Jesus some persons in Roman Palestine had more. Many others had a whole lot less.

Studies of the economy of Mediterranean antiquity repeatedly emphasize the highly stratified class structure which served to isolate the wealthy elite from the agrarian peasants and the urban poor. Corresponding to this stratification was a highly inequitable distribution of landed wealth. The broader world of the Roman Empire was replicated in the cities, villages, and provinces which came under Rome's hegemony. The Jews, for their part, had a sacred ideal according to which they could evaluate the present situation. It was clear that economic realities in ancient Palestine were far removed from the idealized picture painted in the Torah. This blatant discrepancy between ideal and reality-between the equitable distribution of landed wealth commanded in the Law and the rapacious accumulation of land by the elite of Jesus' day-cried out for explanation.¹⁹

As the chart above illustrates, two contrasting explanations of wealth and poverty vied for a hearing among Jesus' contemporaries. We saw them illustrated, above, from Mark 10 and James 5, respectively. The disciples' outlook in the former passage reflects the conventional wisdom that identified wealth as a sign of divine favor. It was clearly in the interest of the elite to promote such a conviction. The viewpoint both legitimated elite economic privilege and implicitly communicated to the populous that to fight against the social system (with its inequitable distribution of wealth) was to fight against God himself.

Many, however, remained unconvinced. A searing critique of land acquisition persisted during the Second Temple period, which explained wealth not in terms of divine favor but of greed and injustice on the part of the Jewish aristocracy. I cited James 5 above. Extra-canonical literature reveals the same convictions. Landed wealth is specifically attributed to human greed in the Psalms of Solomon (c. 1st century B.C.E.). Again, the author targets his critique at Jewish leadership:

Why are you sitting in the council of the devout, you profaner? And your heart is far from the Lord, provoking the God of Israel by lawbreaking. (Pss. Sol. 4:1)

And their eyes are on a man's peaceful house, as a serpent destroys the wisdom of others with criminal words. His words are deceitful that (he) may accomplish (his) evil desires; he did not stop until he succeeded in scattering (them) as orphans. He devastated a house because of his criminal desire; he deceived with words; (as if) there were no one to see and judge. He is satiated with lawless actions at one (place), and then his eyes are on another house, to destroy it with agitating words. (Pss. Sol. 4:9-12)

Let the crows peck out the eyes of the hypocrites, for they disgracefully empty many people's houses and greedily scatter (them). (Pss. Sol. 4:20)²⁰

The author of this biting criticism would have vehemently rejected the elite myth that wealth signified divine favor. The translator accurately interprets "the council of the devout" (Pss. Sol. 4:1) to refer to the supreme council, the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. It is the priestly aristocracy that is primarily in view in this scathing attack. And the accumulation of landed wealth is the specific evil denounced.²¹

Jesus joins the chorus which rails against rapacious land acquisition on the part of the elite. He explicitly rejects the association of wealth with divine favor. The hyperbole could not have been more striking: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). According to Jesus' "subversive wisdom," not only were the rich "not automatically within the covenant, but very likely outside it."²²

Not only does Mark's Jesus reject conventional wisdom about the relationship between wealth and piety. He also aligns himself with those who call into question the legitimacy of the excessive acquisition of landed wealth. In a familiar saying, Jesus explicitly censures Jewish leaders who acquire landed resources by exploiting the powerless:

Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely. (Mark 12:38-40)

Finally, Jesus decries another closely related aspect of the structural evil which characterized the social world of his day—the unjust treatment of day laborers who work the elite's land. In response to the RYR's initial question, Jesus lists five of the last six commandments of the Decalogue. Each generally reflects the LXX version.²³ Instead of the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet" (Exod 20:17), however, Jesus enjoins, "You shall not defraud" ... (Mark 10:19).²⁴ Augmentation of the Decalogue would have Augmentation profoundly striking in a society steeped in Torah Here the addition is a particularly important one, since the Greek verb ... is the very word used in Jas 5:4:

Look! The wages you failed to pay ... the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.²⁵

A not-uncommon scenario in Roman Palestine began with a peasant land-owner borrowing money from the wealthy during a year of poor harvest. At times, seasons of marginal harvest came one after another. Debt led to foreclosure, resulting in the confiscation of land. Peasants were relegated to tenancy, or to working as day laborers for the elite with large land holdings.²⁶ We learn from Jas 5:4 that some of the elite failed to pay their workers their rightful wages.²⁷ Persons present during Jesus' encounter with the RYR would indeed have been startled by Jesus' addition of "You shall not defraud" to the various commands of the Decalogue. The liberties Jesus takes with the Decalogue serve to reinforce Mark's portrayal of Jesus as a teacher with authority (cf. 1:22). But the specific expression would have been a familiar one. The command, "You shall not defraud," would have immediately elicited in the minds of Jesus' listeners the whole constellation of images which associated elite wealth with greed, land acquisition, and the abuse of day laborers.²⁸

D. Summary of Mark 10:23-27

Jesus has overtly rejected the elite myth that riches are a sign of divine favor. Instead, he lays at least partial responsibility for the highly inequitable distribution of landed wealth in Roman Palestine at the feet of the elite aristocracy. Certainly, Jesus addressed the RYR as an individual in the command of Mark 10:21. But Jesus clearly proceeded, in the ensuing discussion with his disciples in vv. 23-27, to censure institutionalized greed, which had been legitimated by the elite myth that wealth constituted a sign of divine favor.

The dialogue almost concludes on a note of hopelessness. The poor are defrauded of land and wages, and the possessions of the wealthy constitute not a sign of spiritual favor but, rather, an obstacle to entering the kingdom. "Who then," ask the disciples (v. 26), "can be saved?" In his astounding answer to this question Jesus asserts in v. 27 that "... wealth makes salvation so humanly more than impossible that only the Almighty can bring it about."²⁹ The beacon of hope reflected in the final clause—...—leads us to wonder just how God will use his power to guarantee the salvation of the rich.

But the statement also raises a broader question for the reader steeped in the realities of ancient economics. How will God use his power to guarantee the salvation of those whom the rich have oppressed? Surely the "kingdom of God" (vv. 23, 24, 25) would include among its tangible blessings a fair and just allocation of Israel's economic resources. As we shall see below, Jesus answers the question not by calling for the reformation of the social structure of Roman Palestine as a whole, but rather by establishing an alternative community in which resources would be distributed in such a way as to assure the adequate satisfaction of the needs of every member.

II. MARK 10:28-31-WEALTH AND SACRIFICE IN JESUS' COMMUNITY

Peter's exclamation-"We have left everything to follow you! "-sets the stage for Jesus to present his vision for an alternative social reality: a surrogate kinship group in which material resources are to be freely shared according to need and availability in such a way as to eliminate the socio-economic inequities characterizing the world of Mediterranean antiquity:

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:29-31)³⁰

Scholars have correctly identified in Jesus' words the establishment of a "fictive kinship group-in less technical terms, a new family-around himself."³¹ As G. Lohfink notes,

Those who follow Jesus, who for the sake of the reign of God leave behind everything they have had, become a new family, a family in which, paradoxically, there are again brothers, sisters, mothers and children.³²

It is beyond the purview of this essay to trace the surrogate family idea throughout Jesus' teachings. Suffice it to say that family-as it was understood in Mediterranean antiquity-is the primary social metaphor for Christian community, not only in the gospels but throughout out the NT and early church writings, as well.³³ For our purposes, it will be enough to acquaint ourselves with the economic implications of the kinship metaphor as it finds expression in Mark 10.

It is important to note that kinship and economics were deeply intertwined in Mediterranean antiquity.³⁴ This means that when Jesus commands the RYR to divest himself of his possessions, more than the man's financial (landed) assets are at stake. As N. T. Wright suggests,

Closely linked with the eschatological call to cut loose from family ties was the similar call to sit loose to possessions. For most people in the ancient world, the most basic possession was land; for Jews, the land was of course the holy land, promised by YHWH to his people Just as Israel had "inherited" the land in the first place, land would be the most basic inheritance that a father could leave to his children; the latter phenomenon, indeed, would be given religious depth and significance by the former. This, then, rather than an attack on the first-century equivalence of twentieth-century materialism, is what was most deeply at stake when Jesus summoned people to give up their possessions.³⁵

This connection between kinship and economics, so characteristic of pre-industrial agrarian society, explains why the challenge in Mark 10:21 must be read in the light of Jesus' teaching about the surrogate family of believers in vv. 28-30.³⁶ Peter, in essence, claims to have obeyed the radical charge given to the RYR (cf. v. 28 and v. 21). Jesus told the RYR to disown all of his possessions 863 Peter, speaking for the twelve, claims to have left all . Jesus proceeds to define Peter's "all" to include both material possessions and family relations . B. Malina and R. Rohrbaugh are sensitive to the connection between Peter and the RYR:

Jesus makes two demands on the "greedy" young man: to sell what he owns and to follow Jesus. The demand to sell what one possesses, if taken literally, is the demand to part with what was the dearest of all possible possessions to a Mediterranean: the family home and land. That these are precisely what is meant is clear from the turn of the discussion in vv. 23-30. And to follow Jesus means to leave or break away from the kinship unit (v. 29), a sacrifice beyond measure.³⁸

Other considerations also argue for a connection between v. 21 and the dialogue in vv. 28-31. Notice (1) the parallel use of the verb in vv. 21 and 28; and (2) the inclusio in v. 29 (repeated with modification in v. 30) whereby family relationships are framed, as it were, by the more economically charged expressions The use of the latter term to conclude the list of sacrifices made by the disciples immediately elicits in the mind of the reader a connection with the Jesus' dialogue with the RYR back in vv. 17-21.³⁹ R. Gundry adds the observation that the emphatic pronoun ... v. 28) has also been placed in the text to bring out an intended contrast between the disciples and the RYR.⁴⁰ Our passage (10:17-31), therefore, is a seamless whole which must be read as such. The connection is clear: Peter and the disciples have done precisely what Jesus demanded of the RYR.⁴¹

The command of v. 21 must, therefore, be interpreted in light of Jesus' teaching about the family of believers in the ensuing context. A straightforward reading of v. 21, taken in isolation, suggests that Jesus wanted the RYR to divest himself of his belongings by distributing the proceeds to the poor of the land in general. Then, the man was to follow Jesus-i.e., join Jesus' group. In view of the broader narrative context, however (especially vv. 28-30), I maintain that the phrase "sell what you own, and give the money to the poor" should rather be understood as a challenge to the RYR to make his wealth available to the members of Jesus' alternative community, that is, to his potential new family of fellow believers.⁴² As I will demonstrate below, this is how the early Christians in Jerusalem understood Jesus' teaching. And it is clearly the way in which Mark 10 was read by Christians elsewhere in the early Roman Empire.⁴³

Mark 10:30 offers a picture of this surrogate family dynamic in action. Jesus assures Peter that both his relational and material needs will be satisfied in the context of the new kinship group of which he is a part. The promise to Peter assumes as its background a constellation of family values which characterized the patrilineal kinship groups of Mediterranean antiquity. Among these values were some tenaciously held convictions about the place of material goods in the family setting. Specifically, the sharing of material resources constituted a characteristic practice of Mediterranean family systems. The assumption that the members of a patrilineal kinship group must each have access to the family's material resources is a recurring theme throughout ancient literature. Source material reflecting ancient family values may be found elsewhere." For our purposes, it is enough to cite a few examples of how Jesus' community-of-goods ideal found expression among the members of God's alternative family during the first two centuries of the Christian era.

III. HISTORICAL PRAXIS-KINGDOM ECONOMICS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

One need not read far into Luke's history of the early Christian church to encounter the very behavior implied in Jesus' description of kingdom praxis in Mark 10:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37; cf. Acts 2:44-45)

Some scholars relegate narratives such as these to Lukan idealization. S. Bartchy demonstrates, however, contra H. Conzelmann, that Luke's depiction of the sharing of goods is neither idealized nor fictional.

Rather, Luke presents the group's understanding of itself as an alternative kin group practicing central Mediterranean family norms, including the "obligation to be certain that the needs of everyone in the group are met."⁴⁵ This, of course, is precisely what we would expect from our interpretation of Mark 10, above. Jesus established his group according to the family model. The early church in Jerusalem then put Jesus' social vision-and the attitude toward possessions which the kinship model implied-into practice.

The emphasis in Luke's account upon "lands and houses," and the reference to the sale of Barnabas' "field," are particularly striking in light of our knowledge of Palestinian agrarian economics. Notice, moreover, that persons who made such economic sacrifices did so for the sake of the needy of the community. Those with landed wealth among the first post-Easter followers of Jesus apparently did not sell their possessions, distribute the proceeds to Jerusalem's poor, and then follow Jesus (cf. Mark 10:21, traditionally interpreted). Rather, they brought their resources into the community; and the needy who received help from the sale of "lands or houses" were members of the community itself ("There were no needy persons among them," 4:34). This harmonizes perfectly with my suggested interpretation of Mark 10:21.

One can trace the theme of shared resources in the surrogate Christian family throughout the first three centuries of church history.⁴⁶ I will conclude with a single example of this central kinship practice, one particularly relevant to my discussion, since the text I will cite constitutes the earliest extended interpretation of Mark 10:17-31. I refer to Clement of Alexandria's *Quis Dives Salvetur?*

Clement (d. c. 215) writes for an audience of some means.⁴⁷ He apparently encountered high-status Christians often in his position as head of the catechetical school at Alexandria. Clement's struggles with Mark 10 led him to write a treatise on the passage, known in English as *Who Is the Rich Man Who Is Saved?* His interpretation of Mark 10 is, therefore, more than a mere theoretical exercise. It is Clement's attempt to interpret for his wealthy students Jesus' command to the RYR to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. Clement's approach reinforces the reading outlined above, and his comments will serve as an appropriate conclusion to my essay.

First, Clement clearly recognizes that to take Jesus' command in a woodenly literal sense would bring no benefit to the family of God:

How could we feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, cover the naked and entertain the homeless, with regard to which deed He threatens fire and the outer darkness to those who have not done them, if each of us were himself already in want of all these things?⁴⁸

Instead, Clement takes a position on the issue identical to that of Jesus in Mark 10, and the early church in Acts 2-4. Central to Clement's social vision for Alexandrian Christianity is the idea that the church is a family. Kinship terminology abounds throughout Clement's treatise in passages where he discusses interpersonal relationships in the Christian church.⁴⁹ The family metaphor is especially important to Clement when he discusses the place of wealth in the Christian church. Like Jesus in Mark 10, the social context which Clement adopts in order to address the perplexing issues of wealth and poverty is that of the surrogate family of God. From Clement's point of view, the rich man who shares God's perspective on his riches holds possessions and gold and silver and houses as gifts of God, and from them ministers to the salvation of men for God the giver, and knows that he possesses them for his brothers' sakes rather than his own [he is] a ready inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁰

Note the presence in the above citation of the same terminology found in Mark 10 ("brother," "kingdom"). The idea that the rich should share his bounty with needy brethren in the context of the Christian surrogate kin group surfaces again in two other important passages in Clement's treatise:

Those who believe in Him He calls children and young children and babes. . He declares that all possessions are by nature unrighteous, when a man possesses them for personal advantage as being entirely his own, and does not bring them into the common stock for those in need; but that

from this unrighteousness it is possible to perform a deed that is righteous and saving, namely, to give relief to one of those who have an eternal habitation from the Father.⁵¹

But if we owe our lives to the brethren, and admit such a reciprocal compact with the Saviour, shall we still hoard up the things of the world, which are beggarly and alien to us and ever slipping away? Shall we shut out from one another that which in a short time the fire will have? Divine indeed and inspired is the saying of John: "He that loveth not his brother is a murderer," a seed of Cain, a nursling of the devil.⁵²

Cain's behavior in the Cain-and-Abel narrative (Genesis 4) represented for both Jews and Christians of antiquity the archetype of sibling treachery. By drawing upon the powerful imagery of Cain, Clement essentially demonizes any member of the community who would hesitate to practice that central family value of sharing his riches with those in need. "'Love,'" Clement concludes shortly thereafter, citing Paul of Tarsus, "'seeketh not its own,' but is lavished upon the brother."⁵³

Clement recognized that the directive to the RYR was to be read in light of Jesus' broader social vision, reflected in the ensuing context of Mark 10. To interpret the command literally, and then apply it across the board to all of the faithful, would be to obviate the very social vision Jesus shares with Peter and the eleven in vv. 29-30. Among the early Christians in Jerusalem and in Alexandria-and, indeed, throughout the empire-the wealthy were to view themselves as siblings in a family in which resources are shared according to the needs of the individual members.

The community Jesus established is one in which those who have sacrificed "home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields" for Jesus' sake will receive "a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-and with them persecutions)-and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). This social vision will only become a reality when the rich Christian recognizes that he possesses his wealth "for his brothers' sakes rather than his own."⁵⁴ For Clement, to "sell what you own, and give the money to the poor" (Mark 10:21) is "to bring [your riches] into the common stock for those in need."⁵⁵ And so it was for Jesus, and for the early Christians in Jerusalem.

IV. Conclusion

The reason that it is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" is ultimately due to the nature of the kingdom itself. Jesus' kingdom is to stand in radical opposition to the institutionalized greed of first-century Palestine. It is a place where the material needs of all are met and where wealth is utilized in ways that benefit the community as a whole. As it finds expression among the early Christians, the kingdom of God is first and foremost an alternative community patterned after the social model of the Mediterranean family. As Mark 10:17-31 so clearly reveals, Jesus' social vision stood diametrically opposed to the economic realities of first-century Palestine, where the elite systematically accumulated an inordinate amount of landed wealth at the expense of the poor, forced the peasantry to resort to subsistence tenancy, and then proceeded at times to defraud them of their wages.

Jesus challenged the RYR to do much more than simply divest himself of his wealth. Jesus offered him the opportunity to disentangle himself from the structural evil which characterized first-century Palestinian social relations in order to participate in a new spiritual and socio-economic reality which would someday turn the Roman Empire on its head. Sadly, Mark tells us, "at this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth."

⁵¹Walter W. Wessel, *Mark (Expositor's Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984)*, 715. Similarly, Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (USNTS 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 145.

⁵²Later rabbis, in fact, specifically forbade a person to sell his possessions and distribute them to the poor (m. Arak. 8:4; b. Ket. 50a).

3The whole idea of meritorious "Jewish works of righteousness" has, of course, come under increasing fire since the seminal work of E. P. Sanders (Paul and Palestinian Judaism [Minneapolis: Fortress], 77). Regardless of where one lands on this thorny issue, however, it remains the case that the works-versus-faith debate is one that is wholly foreign to the context of Mark 10.

4Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 330. Heikki Sariola goes so far as to find in Mark 10:17-21 the teaching that salvation is "eine Gabe and Gnade Gottes," and that "alle Menschen bSse sind" (Markus and das Gesetz [AASF Dissertationes Humanarum Litterarum 56; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1990], 174-75). Similarly, Rudolph Pesch remarks disparagingly of "das Leistung-Lohn-Denken des Mannes," and refers to the RYR's regrettable lack of "unbedingtes Gottvertrauen, die Basis wirklich sozialer Praxis" (Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* [HTKNT 2:2; Freiburg: Herder, 1980], 141). Pesch's "Gottvertrauen," however, is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the text, while the "Leistung-Lohn" connection surfaces throughout the pericope (vv. 17, 21, 28-302).

Cranfield, *Mark*, 330.

6Thomas Schmidt, *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels* (JSNTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 111. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 563. Similarly, N. T. Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 302), and William Lane (*The Gospel According to Mark* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 367). The individualized reading is even more pervasive among popular writers (cf. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975], 397).

7Hendriksen, *Mark*, 397.

sH. Sariola (*Markus and das Gesetz*, 153) mentions another thematic connection between vv. 17-21 and vv. 23-27. Both sections treat "das Thema 'das Heil' mit synonymen Worten and Ausdr/icken ... VV 23, 24, 25." Cf. also the similarly sounding synonyms KT41iaTa (v. 22) and (v. 23).

9Strikingly different interpretations of Mark 10:17-22 result when the text is read by disparate social groups U. A. Draper and G. O. West, "Anglicans and Scripture in South Africa," in *Bounty in Bondage* [ed. F. England and T. J. M. Paterson; Johannesburg: Raven, 1989]; G. O. West, "The Interface Between Trained Readers and Ordinary Readers in Liberation Hermeneutics. A Case Study: Mark 10:17-22," *Neot 27/1* [1993]: 165-80). Draper and West compared the way in which relatively affluent South African Anglicans typically read our passage, with the interpretations of "precritical readers ... who are poor and oppressed." For the upper-class readers, Mark 10:17-22 is simply a story about individual sin: the RYR valued his wealth more than following Jesus (Draper and West, "Anglicans and Scripture," 42-43).

Readers from economically marginalized backgrounds interpreted the passage quite differently. They concluded that the RYR had probably obtained his wealth by exploiting others. Individual sin did not go unnoticed by these readers. But the RYRS wealth was not seen as simply a personal barrier between him and God (i.e., an "idol" of some sort). Rather, the aYR's sin consists of the misuse of his wealth in his relationships with others (especially the poor).

The readers were particularly sensitive to the fact that the commandments which Jesus selectively cites from the Decalogue have nothing to do with idolatry and everything to do with interpersonal relations (West, "The Interface," 1993). In contrast, Western scholars employ a great deal of creativity in their efforts to read the first commandment of the Decalogue into the pericope. Walter Schmithals (*Das Evangelium nach Markus* fed. E. Grasser and K. Kertelge; OTK; Wiirzburg: Echter, 1979], 2.453), for example, attempts to draw a connection between "der Eine" of v. 18 (Els) and "das Eine" of v. 21 ..., in order to argue that the RYR's difficulty is not with second table of the Decalogue but, rather, "mit dem ersten Gebot." Compare Cranfield's assertion (*Mark*, 330) that Jesus is here "particularly concerned with the First Commandment." It is quite evident, however, that Second Temple Jews clearly distinguished between (a)

statutes of the Decalogue governing relations between humans and God and (b) those governing relations among people (cf. Philo, *Her.* 168.171-73, *Spec.* 2.63; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.356, 374, 384; 8.280, 300, 394; 9.236; and the discussion in E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE* [London: SCM, 1992], 192-94).

Moreover, the disadvantaged readers cited in West's study interpreted the passage to be addressing structural (i.e., institutional) sin, as well as individual sin. They suggested (correctly, as recent studies of Palestinian agrarian economy clearly demonstrate) that "there might have been social structures which produced wealth for the man and poverty for the people, in the same way that the social system of

apartheid empowered white South Africans to become wealthy and pushed black South Africans into poverty. So even if the man had worked for his property and or had inherited his wealth, he was still part of a sinful social structure" (West, "The Interface," 176-77).

The point should be obvious. Our social location has much to do with the way in which we interpret the gospel pericopes. In the present case, it will be demonstrated that the "pre-critical ... poor and oppressed" readers studied by West consistently interpret Mark 10:17-22 in a manner which is faithful to both the text's socio-cultural background and to its ensuing narrative context (vv. 23-31). Highly educated and socially privileged biblical interpreters, steeped in Western affluence and radical individualism, on the other hand, tend to miss the salient points of the passage entirely.

"Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 123.

11 I assume, with Gundry (Mark, 564) that neither vv. 23-27 nor vv. 28-31 constitute an originally independent pericope. The whole complex (vv. 17-31) is more naturally read as a unit which accurately relates a single historical episode in the life of the historical Jesus.

12 Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 12.

13 Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33b; Dallas: Word, 1995), 561.

14 Biblical citations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

15 Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 75; cf. pp. 71-93. On limited good, see also G. Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist* 67 (1965): 293-315; and Halvor Moines, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (ed. W. Brueggemann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 76-78.

16 Heinrich H. Graetz (*History of the Jews*, Vol. 1 [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891], 40) was among the first to make this observation, contrasting Israel's practices with those of Egypt. In spite of recent recognition that Egyptian religion was perhaps less centralized than has otherwise been assumed (Edward F. Wente, "Egyptian Religion," *ABD* 2:408-12), the priesthood in Egypt (typically associated with large temples like Karnak and Luxor) wielded considerable economic power. At one point in the nation's history (c. 1145 B.C.E.), for example, the Chief Taxing-master was the son of an Egyptian high priest. Noted Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardiner (*The Egypt of the Pharaohs* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1961], 297) concludes from this that "the great temple of Karnak ... was the principle beneficiary [of taxation] rather than the Pharaoh."

17 No evidence exists for the actual enactment of a national Jubilee in the extant historical documents of ancient Israel or the Second Temple period. This powerful image of life as God intended it remained central, however, to the traditions embodied in the Torah.

18Malina, *The New Testament World*, 76.

19For a highly nuanced and persuasive discussion of the social hierarchy in the ancient Mediterranean world see James Malcolm Arlandson, *Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1997). A good introduction to ancient Palestinian economics is found in K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine at the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 99-130. For the debt problem and peasant abuse at the hands of the Jewish aristocracy see Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 51-57. A more comprehensive treatment of Palestinian economics is found in Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1986).

Second Temple Jews were painfully aware of the marked discontinuity between First Testament ideals and present realities, especially where ownership and distribution of land were concerned. As Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 403) maintains, "It was because of the Roman registration of the holy land that Judas the Galilean had started his revolt in AD 6."

2Translated by R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," OTP2:655-56.

21Ibid., 2:655, n. "c." The priestly aristocracy is also charged with abusing the poor in the first-century C.E. document T. Mos. 7:5-10 (cf. J. Priest, "Testament of Moses," OTP 1:930, n. "e").

22Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 302.

23The variations are grammatical (and minor) in nature. Where the LXX uses the future indicative (e.g., 06 KXC, Et3), Mark draws upon the aorist subjunctive ([I' ...]). The variation in the order in which the commandments occur has been adequately addressed elsewhere (Gundry, *Mark*, 562).

24Sariola (*Markus und das Gesetz*, 172) correctly notes that the command iii ... is not to be understood as a simple replacement for (Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 139), or summary of (Ernst Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu* [ed. K. Aland; Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1966], 350), the ninth and tenth commandments. Rather, [Lil ...]19 is best read in the light of Sir 4:1 (see below) and Deut 24:14a: "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers." Jesus has thus targeted the command to the specific situation of wealthy landowners like the RYR (Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* [EKKNT 2.2; Zurich: Benziger, 1979], 87).

25Cf. also Sir 4:1: "My son, deprive not the poor (TOO Tro"v nT-XOD irl) of his living" (RSV). In 34:21-22, the same author closely connects the idea of depriving the poor of bread with that of depriving "an employee of his wages" ... 34:22).

2t, See n. 19 for references. Such abuse was hardly new in Israel's history. Christopher Wright ("Jubilee, Year of," ABD 3:1028), for example, refers to families who "fell victim to the acids of debt, slavery, royal intrusion and confiscation" during the time of the divided monarchy and the exilic period. It must be noted here that recent studies reveal the persistence in Galilee of small family-run holdings, despite the increase in large estates (Sean Freyne, "Jesus and the Urban Culture of Galilee" in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts* [ed. T. Fornberg and D. Hellholm; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995]; D. R. Edwards, "Jesus and the Landscape of Galilee: Assessing the Archaeological Evidence" [paper presented to SNTS, Edinburgh, 1994]). Nevertheless, first-century Galilee was

undeniably characterized by a marked numerical proliferation of large land holdings farmed by tenant-workers (Robert H. Gundry, "Mark 10:29: Order in the List," CBQ 59 [1997]: 471). This means that, whatever the overall numbers, peasants were increasingly losing their land to the wealthy elite.

27 Unlike the post-industrial West, wealth was acquired in Roman Palestine almost exclusively "at the expense of the peasant producers, either through fraud in collecting taxes and tithes, or through lending to peasants having trouble meeting their obligations and then foreclosing or calling in the loans (see, e.g., Matthew 18:23-30)" (Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987], 249). Horsely's observation confirms precisely the conclusion of the lower-class readers in the South African study (cf. n. 9), namely, that the RYR probably obtained his wealth through exploiting others (West, "The Interface," 175-77).

BAs R. Pesch notes, ". . . das Verbot des Raubens zielte ursprünglich insbesondere auf den Schutz des Tagelohners" (*Das Markusevangelium*, 139, author's emphasis).

I recognize that to make my case I must assume a correspondingly specific referent in the Aramaic spoken by Jesus. Such an assumption must ultimately remain speculative, but here it is a reasonable one. If Jesus himself did not cite the command, one can hardly imagine Mark, or a later scribe, doing so. Supporting this assertion is the absence of the expression in the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke, as well as in the variety of Greek manuscripts and versions. As Gundry rightly maintains, "[This] is probably due to the scribes' and the other synoptists' purging from the list of commandments the one commandment not found in the Decalogue. Later insertion of such a commandment seems less likely" (Mark, 562; similarly, Cranfield, Mark, 328-39). The observation of course applies to Mark's handling of the tradition, as well.

This renders wholly unnecessary W.D. McHardy's suggestion that ... originally stood in the margin in Mark 10:19 to indicate the First Testament passage from which the gospel was quoting (cf. Exod 21:10 LXX). McHardy assumes, then, that "from the margin the verb was incorporated into the text and assimilated to the form of the commandments" (Mark 10:19: A Reference to the Old Testament?" *ExpTim* 107/ [1996]: 143). This reconstruction, however, flows in the opposite direction of the tendency (clearly revealed in the history of the text's transmission) to delete, rather than include, Jesus' striking augmentation of the Decalogue.

29Gundry, Mark, 557.

Some assume that Mark 10:29-30 has undergone considerable expansion. Rudolph Bultmann, for example, dismisses the introduction (v. 29)-which according to his reading limits application to the disciples-as a later accretion (*History of the Synoptic Tradition* [3d ed.; New York: Harper, 1963], 129-30). Others argue against tracing the reference to eternal life "in the age to come" back to the historical Jesus (Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 239). I am not persuaded on either account. Moreover, my thesis remains unencumbered by such suggestions, since the core

saying concerning abandoning and receiving "house . . . fields" is generally acknowledged as authentic, in any case.

31Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 403.

32Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 41.

Joseph H. Hellerman, "The Church as a Family: Early Christian Communities as Surrogate Kinship Groups" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 1998).

Scholars speak of an "embedded economy." Though true of all societies, it is especially the case that ancient economy must be studied within the framework of the organization of society as a whole. On this see Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); M. Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1985): 481-510; Karl Polanyi et al., *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1971); and the overview in Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom*, chap. 3. For our

purposes, the inseparable connection between economics and kinship for persons in Jesus' audience must be taken into account in our exegesis of the gospel texts. To leave one's wealth is to leave one's family.

35 Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 404-5.

All three synoptic evangelists recognize this. It is precisely why Matthew and Luke have kept the events reflected in Mark 10:17-31 together in a single narrative unit (cf Matt 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30).

37 In the present context, the final term, *oikos*, is a pregnant expression carrying great socio-economic overtones. The first term in the list, *oikos*, may refer to the household as a whole, rather than to tangible assets, i.e., "a house." Lexicography is of little help, since Mark uses *oikos* interchangeably for both ideas (Pierre-Yves Brandt and Alessandra Lukinovich, ... *Bib* 78/4 [1997]: 527). Gundry argues persuasively, however, from the grammar of the text, that the term is here to be understood in the sense "house" ("Order in the List," 466-68), thus confirming his earlier observation that "'Farms' complements 'houses' to finish out the mention of family property at the two extremes of the list" (Mark, 558).

38 Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary*, 123.

39 The list in v. 29 ... has been the object of considerable attention over the years. Early transmitters of the tradition struggled with the interruption of the couplet. The church fathers and various scribes joined the two terms, most often placing them at the beginning of the list. Luke drops from the list altogether. Thomas E.

Schmidt ("Mark 10.29-30; Mathew 19.29: 'Leave Houses... and Region?'" *NTS* 38/4 [1992]: 620) asserts that it is anti-climactic to find ... occurring at the end of the string, after the more profound family sacrifices which precede it. He suggests an Aramaic original which refers not to personal land holdings but rather to one's nation or territory as a whole. The result would be a "familiar three-part ascensive form: house, family (itself indicated in three-part form), and territory." Schmidt acknowledges that his supporting arguments constitute "undeniably slender threads from which to hang a certain solution" (p. 620). More damaging to Schmidt's case, however, is his failure to draw upon the ancient agrarian economy as a backdrop for his interpretation of the passage. Schmidt does refer at one point to "the unlikelihood of land-ownership on the part of most hearers," only to assert, surprisingly enough, that this truth "raises the question of the appropriateness of...in such a list" (pp. 618, 617).

Precisely the opposite is the case. the "unlikelihood of land-ownership on the part of most hearers" was due to the very economic inequities which Jesus addresses in our passage. In view of the connection between vv. 28-31 and Jesus' command to the RYR in v. 21, no more appropriate (and powerful) expression could have been chosen to end the list than the loaded term... Schmidt's reading reveals clearly the methodological fallacy of allowing formal rhetorical considerations (in this case, a "familiar three-part ascensive form") to displace socio-cultural background as the central interpretative tool in the hermeneutical process.

40 Gundry, *Mark*, 557.

41 Contra Dan O. Via (*The Ethics of Mark's Gospel-In the Middle of Time* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 139-40), there is no indication in Jesus' reply that Peter's claim is a false one.

42 A similar interpretation of Mark 10:21 was suggested by Via: "There is to be a community of disciples, and those who are members must give whatever is necessary to sustain the community materially." Via, however, ignores the Palestinian socioeconomic context, and instead suggests that the passage addresses "a fundamentally human problem" (*The Ethics of Mark's Gospel*, 137-38, 143-44).

'This understanding of Jesus' command to the RYR finds further support in the fact that Peter and Andrew did not, at their call, divest themselves of their possessions, distribute the proceeds to the poor of the land, and then follow Jesus.

Evidence suggests, rather, that the fishermen still possessed a house (Mark 1:29) and, perhaps, a boat (3:9; 4:1, 36) and a net (Matt 17:24-27). Yet Mark 1:18 explicitly states that Peter and Andrew immediately left their nets ... in response to the call of Jesus. The solution to this apparent contradiction is found in the early Christians' understanding of what it meant to leave one's belongings and follow Jesus. As argued above, what is in view is not voluntary poverty accompanied by the distribution of one's resources to those outside the community. Rather, "leaving all and following Jesus" meant to view one's material possessions as belonging to the local Christian family as a whole, with the understanding that such resources must be used to meet pressing material needs as they might arise in the church family. See below for further illustrations in the history of the early Christian church.

44 See Hellerman, "The Church as a Family."

45 S. Scott Bartchy, "Community of Goods in Acts: Idealization or Social Reality?" in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 313.

46 See Hellerman, "The Church as a Family." The sharing of material possessions in early Christian communities was in fact so pervasive that thinking pagans took notice. Some even (correctly) connected the activity to the Christian metaphor of the church as a family. Lucian of Samosata, for example, claims that the Christians "despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property" precisely because "their first lawgiver (i.e., Jesus) persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another" (Luc. Perg. Mort. 13).

47 Walter H. Wagner, *After the Apostles: Christianity in the Second Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 173.

48 Quis Div. Salv. 13 (trans. G.W. Butterworth; Clement of Alexandria in LCL [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919]).

49 Hellerman, "The Church as a Family," 234-41.

50 Quis Div. Salv. 16.

51 Ibid., 31.

52 Ibid., 37.

53 Ibid., 38.

54 Ibid., 16.

55 Ibid., 31.

JOSEPH H. HELLERMAN*

*Joseph H. Hellerman is Associate Professor of Undergraduate Biblical Studies at Biola University, LaMirada, California.