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JESUS IN THE SHADOWS: HEALING THE GERASENE DEMONIAIC  
IN MARK'S GOSPEL, AN EXISTENTIAL CHRISTOLOGY

Justin Campbell

*Note bene*—Because this paper relies heavily upon a familiarity with a pericope in Mark, *Obsculta* has elected to include the pericope in full at the end, with the endnotes, for easy reference.

Commentaries on the Gospel of Mark are eager to point out the unique quality of this particular miracle story. It is noted by Eugene Boring, Robert Guelich, William Lane, and Bas M.F. Van Iersel—authors of the four single volume commentaries with which we will initially engage—that “The Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac” breaks the traditional form of an exorcism story in both its length and detail.<sup>1</sup> It is also the single longest episode in Mark’s Gospel. We will explore interpretations and possibilities of meaning as the pericope, Mark 5:1-16, is examined by line, offering a basic comparison of the critical analysis available within standard commentaries on this passage. While these commentaries will provide a preliminary and foundational look at what’s available on this fascinating story in Mark, I will also introduce the reader to the anthropological analysis of the Gerasene demoniac as set forth by René Girard, with the intent of moving us toward

my own interpretation of the pericope—one set in an existential, psychoanalytic critique which has bearing on a larger systematic theological narrative, specifically within the area of Christology.

In the *World Biblical Commentary*, Robert Guelich treats at length a contextual problem of approaching the territory of the Gerasenes “from the sea.” As a form critic, his analysis is the most explicitly diachronic of the four commentaries we will examine.<sup>2</sup> Geographically the territory of Geresia is roughly forty miles from the sea.<sup>3</sup> Guelich proposes a myriad of solutions to this problem which exceed our ability to explore at length, but it will suffice to summate his final assessment that elements of the pericope represent Mark’s redaction of the oral and written sources at his disposal to broker continuity between the miracle on the sea in Mark 4:35-41 and this first miracle in Gentile territory.<sup>4</sup> The location at the sea also provides a setting for the drowning of swine and presumably the destruction of “Legion,” in the very waters which Jesus had “rebuked,” and “silenced” dark forces in the previous scene; an unusual though explicit unification of the language of exorcism and Jesus’ command of the natural elements.<sup>5</sup>

In Mark 5:2-5, the story breaks with tradition by describing the plight of the possessed man in detail. Van Iersel posits the repetition and descriptiveness as an expressive attempt to emphasize the utter helplessness of this particular demoniac, definitively beyond the rescue of human aid.<sup>6</sup> Guelich strikes a fascinating note by pointing out that 5:3-5 collectively describes “the four characteristics of insanity in Judaism,”—running around in the night, rending one’s garments, spending the night in cemeteries, and destroying what

one has been given.<sup>7</sup> Boring notes that this exorcism, like other healings in the Gospel, contains intimations of the resurrection, but he perhaps rightly notes, “This is not a story about the response of faith and its transforming power, but about an invasion of alien territory and reclaiming it for the kingdom of God.”<sup>8</sup> Lane posits the possibility that the elaborate introduction is meant to reflect the perspective of the townspeople who were familiar with the man’s condition and had indeed attempted to subdue him with chains and fetters. Boring and Guelich both indicate an implicit connection between these opening lines and Isaiah 65:3-5. Guelich particularly emphasizes that the repetition and descriptiveness is meant to intentionally invoke Isaiah to the informed reader, highlighting the theme of uncleanness in this new, Gentile territory, and reinforcing it with the presence of swine in Mark 5:11, which directly correlates to Isaiah 65:5, “Living among the graves and spending the night in caverns, eating swine’s flesh.”<sup>10</sup> All four of the commentaries utilized here make reference to Mark 5:4 and its obvious allusion to Mark 3:27, though the intentionality of this connection is not explored in much depth. Indeed, when Mark 3:27 is examined in the context of the larger parable in which it appears, aptly titled “Jesus and Beelzebul” in the NAB, there is to my mind an inexhaustible richness in connection with the Gerasene demoniac, especially for a reading which would attempt to draw out specific theological implications of this possession and healing story. This will be explored in greater depth further on. In any case, the binding and breaking of the shackles is presented straightforwardly in these commentaries to emphasize the wild and unfettered strength of the possessed man.<sup>11</sup>

Mark 5:6-10 brings the demoniac and Jesus into a direct encounter, and resumes the narrative action left off at 5:2.<sup>12</sup> Our commentaries all note the correlation between Mark 5:7 and Mark 1:24, where the demon already knows Jesus by name and recognizes him as the Holy one of God, or Son of the Most High God. Further, the demon(s) question Jesus in each of these pericopes, asking what he has to do with them or what they have in common (translations differ).<sup>13</sup> In these commentaries the former point is more directly emphasized than the latter, but as I develop my own reading, the parallelism between Mark 5:7 and Mark 1:24 will be of particular importance, especially the striking question, “what do you have to do with me?”

Notable is an understanding of the demon’s use of Jesus’ name as an effort to gain control over him, an interpretation which can be further evidenced by Jesus’ asking the demon’s name in 5:9 as a kind of counter attack, though Guelich disagrees with this assessment.<sup>14</sup> Van Iersel takes a unique approach among the commentators by positioning the demon’s address of Jesus as, “Son of the Most High God” as a form of mockery or literary irony, perhaps in reference to God’s words from heaven at the baptism of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> It is noted that the kneeling position of the possessed man should not be interpreted as reverence, rather, in combination with the plea that he not be tormented, the reader is to understand that the demon already recognizes its imminent defeat.<sup>16</sup> Such a reading coincides well with what immediately follows the protestation of torture, where in 5:8, the narrator parenthetically explains that Jesus had already commanded that the unclean spirit come forth from the man. Much can be made of the demon’s response. By calling itself “Legion,” some biblical exegetes have read an intentional

political undercurrent into the whole of this demonic story.<sup>17</sup>

A legion was an army of roughly six thousand Roman soldiers whose presence would have certainly been a reality with which the Palestinian region would have had to contend. Indeed, Boring, in his commentary, persuasively argues the merits of such a reading before ultimately dismissing the likelihood that Mark's narrative intentions were explicitly political.<sup>18</sup> He suggests that even the swines' stampede to their death can be neatly accounted for by such a political reading since "The Tenth Legion, stationed in Palestine, had the insignia of a wild boar on its banners."<sup>19</sup> Van Iersel makes a compelling observation from the reader's perspective, where he wonders if the "collective power" of the Legion "had not been behind the sudden storm of 4:37 which had nearly caused Jesus' crossing to end in a disaster."<sup>20</sup> Guelich's concerns swing back to a form critical analysis where he posits the "Legion" as a later insertion into the older traditional exorcism narrative.<sup>21</sup>

Mark 5:11 introduces the reader to the herd of swine which had been "feeding on the hillside," presumably throughout the preceding events of the narrative. Lane and Van Iersel here note that the presence of pigs reiterates with certainty that Jesus and his disciples are indeed in Gentile territory.<sup>22</sup> Guelich also affirms this, while observing a double meaning meant to connote the profound "tone of uncleanness," which was set in the opening of the story with its reference to the possessed man having an "unclean" spirit, and the repetitious use of the "tombs." He thus finds continuity between the swine and the theme of 5:3-4, suggesting that they were a part of the original exorcism, which under Mark's

pen had undergone midrashic development from Isaiah 65:5.<sup>23</sup> Van Iersel suggests that the swine provided an appropriate home for the demons, since from the Jewish perspective an unclean spirit might properly belong with unclean animals, and thus the demons “find a relatively safe shelter in them.”<sup>24</sup> To my mind this explanation lacks fecundity, since in 5:13 the swine would stampede to a watery death. Readers know not whether the demons or the swine impelled this final action, but it’s certainly clear that one or both was not in fact “at home” with the other. Lane suggests that the stampede represents the “ultimate intention of the demons with respect to the man they had possessed,” bringing about the destruction of God’s creation in swine that had been thwarted in man on account of Jesus’ interference.<sup>25</sup> Here we wonder why, if destruction rather than torture was the ultimate aim of the demonic possessors, they did not by brutal force impel their human victim to take his own life over the cliff or through gnashing with rocks?

The final scene, verses 14-16, facilitates a shift away from the healed demoniac to the reaction of the witnesses. The reader hears nothing of the disciples; it’s possible that they are still in the boat. But the swineherds run and report this incident, and people come to see. Lane and Boring point out that the witnesses would have been very familiar with the possessed man, as it was they who were local residents and had unsuccessfully attempted to bind him.<sup>26</sup> Boring is also eager to emphasize the distinctiveness of this conclusion to an exorcism story when compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the Gospel. Here “the story’s repercussions and the conclusions drawn from it seem to be as important as the exorcism itself.”<sup>27</sup> He concludes his remarks by pointing out the irony implicit in the people’s

“fear,” at witnessing the formerly raging mad man suddenly “sitting there clothed and in his right mind.” He remarks that this indicates how familiar with the madness of the demoniac the people had become, whereas when peace has finally been restored, they find themselves bewildered. Boring suggests their fear is at least in part the recognition of the power wielded by this stranger from the other shore. “They had not been afraid of the raging of the madman; they had become accustomed to his ravings as an aspect of their given, normal world. Now they realize they are in the presence of someone for whom such a world is not the unchangeable, unnoticed givenness of everyday life, and this is scary indeed.”<sup>28</sup>

Eugene Boring raises a point in his discussion of the demise of the swine which, along with Brendan Byrne, he notes has been a recurrent concern among biblical critics regarding the ethicality of Jesus allowing so many animals, (presumably about two thousand), to needlessly die, and further, to apparently have no regard for what was surely the livelihood of the herdsmen who tended them. Was this not a sin?<sup>29</sup> That would depend on whether we take Jesus to have had foreknowledge about the fate of the swine when he allowed Legion to enter them, information we are not privy to in the story. Ultimately, Boring concludes that these considerations were not of concern in the story itself, for its ultimate purpose was theologically driven.<sup>30</sup> As Byrne puts it in *A Costly Freedom*, “the concerns are reasonable but they import into the text considerations stemming from a literal understanding going well beyond the limits of its concentrated symbolic focus.”<sup>31</sup> The tension between these two levels of understanding speaks to the larger overarching issue of interpretative method that must necessarily become a concern of this essay as it ventures



into the territory of its own analysis of the pericope. Accordingly, we will need to digress briefly into a discussion of hermeneutics.

The critical commentaries we have examined lend themselves in varying degrees to a reading of this story that is surprisingly literal. The commentaries take symbolism into account, but not to the extent that would subordinate the events of the narrative to what those symbols signify. The symbolic elements are not viewed then as the center of the story, or what the action of the story revolves around; rather, the symbols are secondary to the action of the story, rendering them almost accidental to the events, which the narrative describes. As a result, the theological metanarrative in Mark to which all of the stories and events in the Gospel speak is only acknowledged by these commentaries in fragmented pieces. If, for example, the prostration of the possessed before Jesus and the binding with chains and shackles are read symbolically, it is only in terms of what can be deduced directly from the narrative description. Because the narrative tells us the man is possessed, his prostration is taken as admission of defeat rather than reverence, but no inquiry into the action of prostration is made beyond this, no further analysis of its symbolic potential. The chains and shackles are read to be the logical response of locals to subdue a person who is either possessed or otherwise insane. Reference to the narrative connection between the binding of the demoniac and the binding of the strong man in Mark 3:27 is made by all four commentaries, but there is no attempt from this to explicate the chains and shackles on the level of symbol, which may connote theological manifestations which transcend the actual described events of healing the Gerasene demoniac.

The importance of this discussion on the place of symbolism within the narrative, and its function as either primary or secondary to the purpose of the text is essential to understanding the hermeneutic in which an exegete operates. In her explanation of narrative criticism, Elizabeth Malbon has this to say:

The Markan narrator says that Jesus “went up the mountain,” to appoint the Twelve. Historical critics have searched in vain for a mountain in Galilee. But for the implied author and implied reader, who know their Bible, “the mountain” is where God comes to meet leaders of the people of God. Similarly, “the sea” is where God manifests divine power, and “the wilderness” is where God manifests divine care in miraculously feeding the people of God.<sup>32</sup>

This is an example of reading the symbolic meaning of setting into the Gospel in an informed way, one which does not arbitrarily assign symbolic significance, but rather takes into account the biblical narrative as a whole, understanding what these places—the mountain, the sea, and the wilderness have traditionally signified in the Old Testament, and accounting for how midrash has traditionally interpreted them. The examples given in the above passage are sound, firmly established symbolic readings of biblical narrative. But the existence of a biblically sound reading also implies the possibility of an erroneous one.

Christopher Tuckett raises the question of whether a literary critical reading of text has enough objective criteria to evaluate the validity of various interpretations.<sup>33</sup> This is not an unwarranted objection, and it is one that should be considered carefully in light of the possibility

that texts, biblical or otherwise, can be hijacked by an interpreter to suit a purely subjective and baseless reading. As Mark Allan Powell puts it, "Tuckett wonders whether any scholarly integrity can be maintained when critics are free to read into texts meanings that were not intended."<sup>34</sup> Powell concedes that under the large umbrella of literary criticism, such subjectivist responses are sometimes encouraged, but that a proper understanding of narrative criticism takes into account that the text itself sets limits on the range of possible interpretations.<sup>35</sup> An interpretive reading that either contradicts or does injustice to the text as a whole must be viewed with considerable suspicion. So while the narrative critic may allow for more than one possible reading of the same text to have validity, one's interpretations are subject to a community of readers who have the responsibility to assess and potentially reject readings that are clearly erroneous.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, while narrative criticism does not expressly attempt to unpack authorial intention, it is the responsibility of the narrative critic to understand the historical situation of the implied reader, and to have appropriate historical information about the time and location in which a text was constructed, which can potentially validate or invalidate various interpretations.<sup>37</sup>

The hermeneutic of narrative criticism shares essential similarities with that of reader-response. Though reader-response criticism emphasizes the experience of the reader as reader immersed in the text, while narrative critique is more objectively grounded in the framework of the composition as a whole, both approaches, as Powell points out, allow for the possibility that the text can speak in the here and now in ways that it did not at previous points in history, or to a different kind of people.<sup>38</sup>

Powell calls this an “expanded hermeneutic,” which permits the possibility of a reading that is both new and objectively valid. In the context of biblical studies, this means that through the Word, revelation can be communicated in the present and is not seen foremost as a fossilized historical event. He remarks:

Very little attention has been paid to the interpretive processes through which these texts are appropriated in the present. Narrative criticism attempts to fill this gap in biblical studies by examining the ways in which texts become meaningful to readers. The use of this method is hermeneutically significant for the church in that it enables scholars to complete the full task of interpretation in a way that does not limit revelation to events that happened in the past. Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic...the sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today.<sup>39</sup>

Revelation received, interpreted, and understood by today’s reader may suggest theological possibilities previously unconsidered. This is precisely because the revelation requires an interpreter, the Bible requires a reader in order for the Word of God to be received. This does not suggest that revelation arbitrarily changes, but it does contend that the Word of God and the human understanding of it cannot be limited to one point in history or one particular socio-cultural reception. Rather than limiting or relativizing God’s Word, as some might lament, this opens revelation to a reception truly worthy of its name. Indeed, if there is any

blasphemy or irreverence to be detected here it is only in the presumption that the Word of God has nothing fresh, nothing new, nothing surprising left to speak—that it is somehow exhaustible. It is in fact the inexhaustibility of revelation that makes the very discipline of theology possible and worthwhile. The idea that theology might have anything left to say is dependent on our understanding of scripture as a dynamic voice of the living God, which is ever speaking to us anew. Interestingly, Powell in his defense of narrative criticism, and Werner Stenger in support of historical-critical method, both suggest that no matter what exegetical hermeneutic is operative there is a leap to be made from the employed interpretive method to relevant theological statements.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the theology does not necessarily follow or emerge neatly from any particular way of dealing with the text. Narrative criticism can determine what a story means, but the theological implications of that meaning take a step away from the narrative world and toward a conceptual and systematic construction. This is true as well of the historical-critical method, where interpreters are continually confronted with the problem of “how one is to make the qualitative transition from the historical elements of biblical texts to theological statements that are relevant for today.” Exegesis, as Stenger deftly puts it, “continually breaks its teeth on this hard nut.”<sup>41</sup>

For an example of this dynamic at work one need look no further than Church doctrine itself; the sacraments, the Trinity, the very meaning of Christ’s death on the cross. Indeed, the Gospels already reflect the early stages of a post-Easter ecclesiology being worked out within Christian communities. We should remember that Paul’s theology as expressed in his early letters is thought to predate

the Gospel in its written form. The doctrine of the Church, which has been developed from Paul and the Gospels, is therefore scripturally derivative but not reducible to scripture itself; it has, under the discipline of theological reflection, become something more. Tradition, we might say, is the visible and lived manifestation of theological evolution in the Church. Rather than prioritizing systematics over the Word itself, I believe the development of theological insight is a testament to the power of scripture; a theological potency which has been continually unpacked over the millennia, and that in light of its interaction with diverse and evolving cultures, is capable of bearing new fruit.

The above reflections ought to enable us to turn our attention to the interpretive lens of René Girard in his reading of the Gerasene demoniac. If I have labored over exegetical hermeneutics and their connection with systematic theological insight, it is because Girard provides a definitive turn toward the efficacy of symbol in this pericope and quite compellingly connects it with his anthropological interpretation of the Gospel as a whole. Though my reading of the story focuses on different aspects than Girard, it employs a similar hermeneutic, which finds the images and events of this pericope deeply symbolic in a way that becomes compelling when theologically examined within the context of the Cross. I think Girard's reading, and hopefully my own, exemplify the kind of literary critical analysis that stands up to scrutiny precisely by being testable against the logic of the whole Gospel, the theological undercurrent which unifies all of its events and speaks to the ultimate question—*who is Jesus of Nazareth?* Girard provides a fabulous example and inroad into such a discussion.

Girard approached the Gospel as an anthropologist, well versed in the analysis of human development over the ages. Of particular interest to Girard were the social dynamics that enabled the phenomenon of increased cultural sophistication. He found in his work that all mythologies and early religious developments shared a common thread of violence and victimization at their center.<sup>42</sup> This process, according to Girard, occurs as a result of mimeticism, a phenomenon of human development, wherein people come to define themselves and understand their own identity on the basis of desire for what others have, and eventually for who and what others are.<sup>43</sup> This process begins in infancy as a mere form of mimicry and imitation and is necessary for the development of the ego. According to the theory, however, mimeticism always turns into rivalry with the imitated other, and begins a cycle of competition, conflict and eventual violence.<sup>44</sup> Mimeticism as a theory far predates Girard, and its nuances as well as the complexities of its development are well beyond the scope of this inquiry. What's important for our purpose is to note that Girard believes cultural identities, religious or otherwise, have been fully shaped by mimetic desire, inevitably leading to conflict within the community, which has historically been resolved by arbitrarily identifying a scapegoat or a victim on whom responsibility for the violence and disorder of the community can be assigned.<sup>45</sup> He identifies this pattern as fully operative in the annals of religious history. When he came to the Gospels late in his career, he

was shocked to find this same story being enacted in the ministry, passion and death of Jesus Christ. The Gospel tells the ancient tale of mimeticism run riot, only in such a way that rather than reinforcing the cycle of violence it systematically, intentionally and repeatedly exposes this process of scapegoating, and definitively reverses it.<sup>46</sup> Of the historical scapegoat, Girard writes,

These are the underlying dynamics of all mythological and religious beginnings, dynamics that other religions succeed in concealing from themselves and from us by suppressing or disguising collective murders and minimizing or eliminating the stereotypes of persecution in a hundred different ways. The Gospels, on the other hand, expose these same dynamics with an unequalled severity and strength...Each of the Gospel stories reveals a religious origin that must remain hidden if mythology and ritual are to be the result. This origin is based on the unanimous belief in the victim's guilt, a belief that the Gospels destroy forever...The Passion reveals the scapegoat mechanism, i.e., that which should remain invisible if these forces are to maintain themselves.<sup>47</sup>

In the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, Girard finds just one example among many Gospel stories of a microcosmic playing out of this larger and essential theme of reversed mimeticism in the overarching narrative, culminating in the Passion. The demoniac and the Gerasene community are acting out the process of mimeticism and its movement toward the fragmentation of the community, toward the creation of a scapegoat on whom the community will heap the burden



and responsibility of violence so that order can be restored.

It is not, in Girard's estimation, only by chance that Satan's greatest faults are envy and jealousy. This is the very crux of mimeticism turning sour.<sup>48</sup> Demons are manifestations of this disorder and fragmentation within a community, the personification of a psychopathology.<sup>49</sup> There are innumerable oddities to the Gerasene story, but Girard references first the fact that the community and the "possessed" are still in a reciprocal relationship. The possessed lives among the tombs, away from town, apparently screaming, wandering and injuring himself; yet the townspeople continue to attempt to subdue him, continually bind him and shackle him, even though he repeatedly breaks free. Rather than leaving him to himself, they continually interact with the demoniac in this process of binding and freeing. Girard writes, "Mark's text suggests that the Gerasenes and their demoniac have been settled for some time in a sort of cyclical pathology...They seem to behave like sick men whose every action fosters rather than decreases the disease."<sup>50</sup>

Further, the demoniac bruises himself with stones—he stones himself. Girard reads this as the acting out on oneself of the punishment that the community is inflicting or intends to inflict in the creation of the scapegoat, the innocent victim presumed guilty. That the demoniac harms himself on the community's behalf, taking on their guilt and condemnation, demonstrates how strongly he is still bound to the community which persecutes him in the reciprocal, systemic nature of the mimetic relationship.<sup>51</sup>

Girard critiques a typical reading of what happens at the healing which all four of our previously examined commentators asserted; that in a traditional method of gaining mastery over the demon by asking its name, Jesus exorcises Legion from the man, who then inhabits the swine who plummet to the sea and drown. Girard asserts that in an age filled with shamans and healers, if Jesus was only a more successful “medicine man” the Gerasenes would not have been so frightened of him. They may indeed have welcomed him as a hero, rather than sending him away.<sup>52</sup>

What was so different, so terrifying about what Jesus does, the healing he bestows on this wracked and wretched man? To understand Girard’s reading we must look to his conception of the demons, the swine, and the cliff as symbols, working together to signify a surprising and unexpected reversal of the norm, of not only what was expected to become of the demoniac but also what the Gerasenes needed the demoniac to be for the sake and order of their community. Only such a reading could explain why the Gerasenes, upon seeing the possessed calm and at peace could possibly be “seized with fear.”

For Girard the demons become symbolic of the townspeople themselves, the persecutors who have identified a scapegoat in this one unlucky man. The Legion is precisely “the many,” the crowd which persecutes the innocent victim.<sup>53</sup> The concern that they not be banished from the country indicates an effort on their part to compromise, and suggests a recognition that in Jesus there is an evident possibility of affecting a total reversal, a new order of things that would not only displace their power over the possessed, but banish them from continuing to persist in the cycle of violence which grips the community.<sup>54</sup> “It is essential for

them not to be *completely and definitively expelled*.”<sup>55</sup> The odd singular entity of Legion, which also contains the crowd within it (“my name is Legion; for there are many of us”), represents the larger principle at work within the persecuting crowd—that of mimeticism, and the way this persecution unites the community to a single purpose of victimizing the “other.” “In describing the unity of the multiple, the Legion symbolizes the social principle itself, the type of organization that rests not on the final expulsion of the demons but on the sort of equivocal and mitigated expulsions that are illustrated by our possessed, expulsions which ultimately end in the coexistence of men and demons.”<sup>56</sup>

It is suggested by Girard that the cliff in this story is laden with the “ritual and penal connotations” that are found elsewhere in the scriptures.<sup>57</sup> Being thrown over a cliff was indeed an explicit form of execution in the ancient world, comparable to stoning.<sup>58</sup> Both are executions which take place at the hands of a mob and both refuse direct contact with the accused so as to avoid being sullied by his or her impurity.<sup>59</sup> Girard notes that in the Gospel of Luke Jesus is pushed to the edge of a cliff by a riotous crowd and nearly thrown from it before he escapes and walks away.<sup>60</sup> This is certainly a foreshadowing of the Passion and in Girard’s view indicates that the Gospel writers took stoning, cliffs, and crucifixion to be, not just operatively synonymous in their result of death, but symbolically so in their representation of collective murder.

When the demons enter the swine they effectively become one, so the swine now too represent the persecuting townspeople—they are the herd.<sup>61</sup> What happens next constitutes the strange and frightening difference between the healing, which Jesus enacts, and those of a

“traditional” sort—the swine throw themselves into the sea and drown. Girard contends that it is neither the demons which drive the pigs to plummet, nor the pigs which drive the demons, and least of all is it Jesus compelling this action; it is rather symbolic of the crowd’s disintegration and death as a result of the mimetic rivalry between them, previously kept in check by the persecution of the innocent victim, the possessed. The collective murder, which falling over the cliff symbolizes in historical and mythological terms, is this time that of the persecuting crowd itself, rather than the scapegoated victim. Girard writes, “In the account of Geresia the lynchers experience the treatment normally reserved for the victim. They are not stoned like the possessed, but they go over the steep bank, which amounts to the same thing...All of them disappear into the abyss while the ex-victim, ‘clothed and in his full senses,’ calmly observes from above the astounding sight.”<sup>62</sup> What Jesus has done here is nothing less than a miracle, for he has reversed thousands of years of anthropological disease, shaken the community to its core by reversing its expectations and its imaginary needs. The persecutors are destroyed, the innocent victim at last redeemed.

It would be difficult to imagine that the author of Mark intended such a psychologically sophisticated exposition of human relations in his construction of the Gerasene story, and of course, Girard would never argue this. He reads this story not in isolation but in the context of the Gospel stories as a whole, with the passion and resurrection of Christ at their center. Though it was yet to be given the name “mimeticism,” could the Gospel writers have consciously identified the tendency to scapegoating and violence, and could they have understood the ministry of Jesus to have been

specifically aimed at undermining it? Here are Girard's thoughts:

The rationality I am disclosing, the mimeticism of human relations, is too systematic in principle, too complex in its effects, and too visibly present both in theoretical passages on scandal and in the accounts entirely controlled by it, to be there by accident. Nevertheless this rationality was not completely devised or created by those who put it there... There is an anthropological dimension to the Gospel text. I have never claimed that it constitutes the whole of the Christian revelation, but I do think that, without it, Christianity cannot truly be itself.<sup>63</sup>

The reader should give these remarks no more or less consideration than they think is due. Bearing in mind that Girard's whole reading is potentially erroneous, what's compelling about it is precisely the way it connects with and sheds light on certain dimensions of a decidedly orthodox theological treatment of the Christ event. In Girard's reading of the Gospel, he sees the passion narrative which is central to them as the finale that culminates a meaning which had all along been intimated by so many of the healings, parables, and events in the narrative—the victim is indeed innocent. At the event of his murder, Jesus becomes the Christ for us, the victim who embraces the persecutor and forgives him, personifying the gift of self which shatters and then reverses what had been presumed to be the original and only dynamic possible in human relationships. The dynamic of victim and victimizer turns out to be a distortion of sin, and the possibility of a different kind of relationality is enacted, the power and truth of which is confirmed in the resurrection. The love, which pours forth from Christ on the cross, the fountain of blood

and water from his side, is the very love, which enables him to rise from death so that death does not have the final say.

Girard scholar and theologian, James Alison, synthesizes the connection between mimeticism, Girard's discovery of its principle at work in the Gospel narratives, and the meaning of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ with a clarity that deserves to be noted at length:

We can say that every human being is, in fact, constituted by and with an in-built relationality to the other which formed him or her. This other constituted the very possibility of human desire... Human desire, as we know it, works by grasping and appropriating being rather than receiving it. In this sense, we are always already locked into the other which forms us in a relationship of acquisitive mimesis, that is, a relationship of violence which springs from, and leads to, death. It became possible to understand this (in fact) not from natural rational deduction (though there is nothing inherently incomprehensible about it), but precisely because of the irruption of a *novum* into the midst of the social other which forms us, a *novum* which is a revelation of a different sort of Other, an Other that is completely outside any form of rivalistic desire and that made itself historically present as a self-giving and forgiving victim. This self-giving victim, from outside human mimetic rivalry, revealed precisely that the death-locked lie of mimetic rivalry flowing from culture's hidden victims is not the original mode of desire, but a distortion of it. That which was chronologically original (and seemed to us to be simply natural) is *discovered* to be logically secondary to an anterior self-giving and creative desire.<sup>64</sup>

This anterior self-giving and creative desire is one that precedes the fallen human condition, and is restored by the love of Jesus

Christ, the new Adam, in the example he gave in his life and ministry, in the pure gift of himself for us and to us on the cross.

Girard's reading opens up the symbolic and psychological in a most helpful way, one that ultimately speaks to the larger question of the Gospels' theological aim, a question that must finally be answered in a fundamental Christology. This is a lens which I bring to my own reading of the passage, however my analysis will focus on what I believe is a crucial element of the pericope that has received too little attention—the possessed running to Jesus at the sight of him, his prostration, and his recognition of Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 5:4-7). It is through careful attention to the interaction between Jesus and the possessed that I will focus my analysis, specifically the theological possibilities opened up by reading Mark 5:4-7 in conjunction with Mark 3:23-27, a literary parallel that begs a variety of deeper theological questions. The conclusions reached in this specific reading will reinforce Girard's logic that indeed a reversal in normativity takes place in the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, a reversal that speaks to the larger Christological aim of the Gospel, culminating in the cross. Specifically, in light of these foregoing reflections this Gospel story can be seen to reveal the shape and character of God's love for sinful humanity, a love that when explored here exegetically is revealed as both startling and scandalous in how it relates to human evil, expressed and manifested concretely in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

The central importance of the demoniac's recognition of Jesus at Gerasa can be further emphasized by a similar occurrence at a separate healing in the very first chapter of Mark, just after Jesus has called his first disciples. A man with an unclean spirit cries out, "What have you to do

with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Mk 1:24). It is interesting that the man who is possessed by one unclean spirit (as far as the text discloses) speaks of “us,” whereas the Legion of whom there are many exclaims in the singular, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!” (Mk 5:7). I wonder if “us” in the first healing does not reveal that there is also a multiplicity of demons inside the man in the synagogue, if in fact this is the first appearance of Legion, right at the beginning of the Gospel narrative. Should this be so, it raises the importance of “Legion” in Mark’s Gospel to new heights, and suggests as Girard has that in “demons” we are not dealing with separate distinct entities but one conceptual manifestation of evil that represents evil par excellence, or that which is most directly opposed to the spirit of God.

Further, I’d like to consider the possibility that when the possessed Gerasene recognizes Jesus he confesses as a man that Jesus is Lord, that is, from his humanity, so that rather than it being the demon who speaks, of which there are many, these words, “what have you to do with me, Jesus,” are spoken by the possessed man himself. This could be evidenced also by the fact that he “adjures” Jesus “by God,” or, in the name of God, begs Jesus not to torment him. We must wonder whether a demon would make any request in the name of God.

We are told that the possessed, having spotted Jesus from afar, “runs” over to him. This presents an interesting dichotomy between the words of the possessed, which indicate fear, and the choice to run over and prostrate himself before Jesus—the demoniac is terrified of Jesus and yet somehow irresistibly drawn to him. His running towards Jesus adds further weight to the possibility that, though “possessed,” the man is



not subject to the will of the “demon” as though controlled by an alien power. If the demon were in fact fully in control, would it not compel the man to run away rather than toward this stranger from the boat, who seems already to emanate some holy power? Indeed, what, in Mark 1:24, is a possessed man doing in the synagogue, in the holy temple of God? In asking these preliminary questions, it should occur to us that the relationship between the demon and the possessed may be quite a bit more complex and nuanced than we are generally inclined to consider.

To what extent can we truly separate the “demon” from the man possessed? Interestingly, a psychoanalytic reading of the narrative largely compliments the evolution of spirituality within the Church’s tradition. While it is true that the Church doctrinally upholds the reality of demonic possession, when viewed from a wide lens we see the extent to which the Church has moved away from identifying “demons” as autonomous entities which take hold of individuals, and toward a nuanced understanding of the human proclivity to neurosis and sin. How do we develop these demons and how do they come to take on a life of their own? In our youth, many of us develop ways of coping with trauma or stress which are initially effective and later become detrimental or even destructive to our lives. These are habits that we ourselves form, but their original impetus may have been an encounter with evil in the form of family dysfunction or any number of abuses. Victims often articulate a real sense of having had their lives high-jacked and permanently altered by such encounters, often leading later to emotional distress, rage, violent or self-destructive behavior, and even suicide (“Night and day among the tombs and on the hillside he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones.”) A recurring theme among

those who get well is their oft repeated claim that they had to take responsibility for the people they had become as adults. The original encounter(s) with evil, which is experienced not just as a disruption but a surd in the very fabric of their lives, was quite real and outside of their ability to control. Nonetheless, the path to wellness has appeared for many to involve taking ownership of the “demons” which had been running and ruining their lives. One must have the courage to say something like: “These are ancient demons which have belonged to many before me, but now they are mine—they belong to me in such a way that I cannot separate myself from them, as though I were myself, and the demons another entity inside of me, compelling me and driving me. No, I must say, *the* demons are actually *my* demons. My demons are my own.” Somehow, this decisive turn in one’s disposition enables one to stop projecting the demons, sharing the demons, and passing the demons on to others. In this respect, a cycle of violence and victimization can be curtailed.

Some never become conscious enough to begin such work; others try and find it impossible. There is a profound sense among the recovering demoniacs of our day that the only force which could possibly disarm and dismantle their rage is one of a divine origin. Many of them go looking for this power, and I would contend, the Gospel bears witness to a God who is looking for the demoniac. “What have you to do with me, Jesus the Most High God?”—the answer is, quite simply, “everything.” We see in the Gerasene demoniac not a frightful and otherworldly creature but a conflicted and deeply human character. He has the courage to approach Jesus for healing, though the very presence of Jesus is a

torment. How truly common an experience is this if we are honest, if indeed what we bring before Jesus in prayer are the demons of our own compulsions, avoidances, and selfishness? Those whose prayer penetrates deeper than cultural obligation or superficial and superstitious petitions ought to recognize this deeply conflicted experience of the demoniac. We kneel before the Lord but bid that he not come too close; we invite him into the mansion of our hearts but lock its closet doors so that he might not see what we hide away in them. In this there is a tragic and even comedic irony, for it is precisely those parts of ourselves we attempt to hide that are in need of healing and that God wishes to bring to wholeness.

But God does not coerce us into opening the door. In a psychoanalytic commentary on the Gerasene demoniac, Diarmuid McGann notes: “the initiative in all four exorcisms in the Gospel is taken by someone other than Jesus.”<sup>65</sup> This is an important consideration, for it carries us into the question of how precisely Jesus heals. What is the relationship to the demoniac that enables Jesus to exercise power over the dark forces, and how is this power to be understood?

The reader learns in Mark 5:4 that the demoniac had broken the shackles and chains which had bound him, and that “no one was strong enough to subdue him.” As has been noted, the allusion here to Mark 3:22-27 is obvious and deliberate. To understand how Jesus masters the demon we need to have some idea of what’s happening in the parable of Jesus and Beelzebul, for it speaks directly to the nature of Satan’s power coming into collision with the power of God.

In Mark 3:22, the people accuse Jesus of evil, saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul, by the prince of demons he drives out demons.” Mark 3:23 then begins with a question

that Jesus puts to the people: “How can Satan drive out Satan?” In parabolic form, Jesus proceeds to refute their claim by explaining that for Satan to destroy his own forces would be self-defeating, and ultimately impossible. “If a house is divided against itself that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him” (Mk 3:25-26). Jesus is claiming that it is not by Satan’s power or authority that he exorcises demons, but by the power and authority of God. In other words, if in fact demons are being banished, then by the logic of the parable, the only possible explanation is that it is divine power, which accomplishes the work. He goes on to tell them how the work is accomplished: “...no one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house” (Mk 3:27). The forces of darkness and the strong man, Satan, must be bound and subdued before the healing work can be done. This is arguably what the townspeople of Gerasa attempt but fail to do on their own accord by binding and shackling, and what Jesus is able to do by virtue of the divine power that he wields.

But we must proceed carefully with this conclusion. Let us take seriously the question, “how can Satan drive out Satan?” Jesus claims that it is not by the force of evil that he expels evil, for this is impossible. Read closer, or at least theologically, the parable constructs a deliberate and impassible contrast between Satan’s power and the power of God. It is not that God is simply *more* powerful, as if good and evil were engaged in a kind of cosmic arm wrestling match. The divine power has a manifestly different and unique character from the power which is

exercised by the forces of evil! The methods used by Jesus to subvert the dark and dominating forces of the devil cannot be those that the devil himself uses to subvert and dominate. Such an argument would be imbued with the same illogicality that Jesus exposes in the parable. Violence begets violence, not peace.

Let us look quickly at an exegetical explanation of 3:27 that gets it wrong: “The expulsion of demons is nothing less than a forceful attack on the lordship of Satan. Jesus’ ability to cast out demons means that one stronger than Satan has come to restrain his activity and to release the enslaved. The heart of Jesus’ mission is to confront Satan and crush him on all fields, and in the fulfillment of his task he is conscious of being the agent of irresistible power.”<sup>66</sup> Far from an issue of semantics, understanding the misuse of language here is the principle theological insight of the Gospels, and the key to understanding “who” Jesus is and “how” he is for us the Christ.

It is not by irresistible power by but irresistible weakness in the face of dominating and aggressive power that such power is disarmed and defeated. “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). The heart of Jesus’ mission is not to confront and crush Satan, but to be confronted by Satan and transform him by the power of divine embrace. This is the opposite of oppressive power that binds; it is rather the liberating power that frees. This is the embrace that cries from the cross, “Forgive them father, for they know not what they do.” The meek and pitiful one who offers his other cheek to the violent aggressor is the victor of the exchange. That this could be so is the very mystery of the resurrected life itself and is foolishness to the world—it is the paradox of the cross. “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to

us who are being saved it is the power of God...for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 COR 1:18, 22). If Henri de Lubac is correct in saying that all Catholic doctrine boils down to a series of paradoxes, these certainly have their roots in the Gospel.<sup>67</sup> How does Jesus “bind” the strong man? We could begin at least by saying that Jesus binds quite differently than the methods of Satan, quite differently than the method of the townspeople, whose literal shackling accomplishes nothing other than exacerbating the demoniac’s misery.

In his essay on the Gerasene demoniac, Jean Starbinski elucidates this point: “The difference between Jesus and the demon does not only appear to be a difference of essence, the result of the division separating the powers of good and evil, but it also appears in the way in which each one exercises his power.”<sup>68</sup> The shackles and chains that the demoniac pulls apart and smashes are the evidence of attempts at subdual that are of themselves violent and possessive. When he breaks them he continues to stone himself, to abuse himself, to wander among the tombs. Jesus is indeed the one who can “subdue” him. He does bind the strong man, but it is to freedom rather than servitude that the Lord attaches him. Just as the foolishness of God is wisdom, so bondage in Christ is true liberty. This can only be so if the binding power of Christ is ontologically different than the binding power of Satan. What it means to be bound by each could not possibly be more divergent. The power that Jesus wields is not one that destroys, not even demons, darkness or Satan—the power exercised by Jesus is one that heals. We seldom consider the possibility that God still awaits the conversion of the devil himself. We shudder to think it possible that God could truly meet evil with love.

It is ultimately, in my estimation, the question of love to which all of these considerations finally converge. In a psychoanalytic critique, James Hillman writes, "the cure of the shadow is a problem of love."<sup>70</sup> It is the analyst's opinion that acceptance, integration, and even love of the "disgusting and perverse" parts of ourselves is necessary if they are to be healed. It is Christianity's contention that the love which this requires is not one which can be summoned from the human heart alone, but requires the aid of divine grace, or nothing other than God's freely offered transformative love. That this love might penetrate to the depths of us, it must engage directly with those corners of our hearts which we desperately attempt to cordon from His view, and our own. This means that in the case of a demoniac, restoral to soundness of mind can only result precisely from an encounter with the Lord's light in the very state of demonic wretchedness, which is his most unlovable self. How does Jesus respond to the question "have you come to destroy us," to the plea, "do not torment me?" It is hardly to destroy or torment. To claim the demon's destruction and the man's retrieval is to create a duality, which misses the mark of the Gospels' pulse. Rather than being destroyed, the demon is converted and thus the man made whole; by being reconciled with Christ, he is reconciled with himself, "clothed and in his right mind."

The kind of love that accomplishes this work in the hearts of human beings is largely alien to us, and hardly comprehensible. The way the story of the Gerasene demoniac concludes is in keeping with the strangeness, the unexpectedness and the gratuitousness of this love. When in Mark 5:18 the man, no longer tormented or threatened by Jesus' presence, pleads to "remain with him,"

Jesus refuses this and sends him home to his family. Many exegetes have read this as an order for the man to proclaim the Gospel in his Gentile territory. There is no reason to doubt this reading, but I'd like to suggest something slightly different:

This is a man who has been freed quite abruptly from demons who held him in subjugation and captivity. It is not difficult to imagine a kind of dismay and confusion in him concerning the event that has just transpired. The reality and the wonder of the miracle undergone are such that for any man there may be a process of coming to accept and to understand fully its implications. For one who has been operating in the paradigm of possessive subjugation it is only sensible, only beautifully human, for him to consider himself obligated to the healer, as though he has traded one master for another. Indeed, as we've tried to demonstrate, if Jesus is a master, the exercise of his authority and power is the antithesis of Satan's. Starobinski writes, "Although we often see in the Gospel's healed individuals showing their faith in Jesus, it would be erroneous to believe for an instant that Jesus, by freeing them from evil demons, appropriates them to himself as his own by exercising a possessive power."<sup>71</sup> Perhaps Jesus' refusal of the man's plea to follow, rather than a kind of rejection, is a final gift. Rather than a refusal of discipleship, it is a gratuitous gesture of good will that says to the man: You are truly free. Go home and be with your family.

If we are to make sense of the Christ event, to understand what's essential about the cross, we must recognize that the reality of God's love, revealed, expressed and mediated through His incarnate Son, is first of all, a gift. We are so accustomed to using this language to express the reality of Christ that it is possible for us to forget what it



means. How would we regard a man who offers us a gift and then proceeds to tell us what he expects in return? The cross is not, and cannot be twisted into a form of spiritual blackmail. The very definition of a *gift* necessitates a freedom in which it is given and a freedom in which it can be received, entirely precluding any form of coercion. Certainly, in receiving a gift we are not prevented from wanting to give back in return; this is fully right and entirely appropriate. If we encounter some measure of God's love and some understanding that a gift has been given, we may be inspired to respond in love, indeed with hearts that in love pour forth the very self-expenditure of Christ crucified. But a heart that can respond authentically in this way must first understand the unconditional nature of the love that's offered through Christ, the only kind of love that can turn the death of crucifixion into the possibility of resurrected life. Again, we turn to James Alison's articulation of this love, how it so differs from human love, and how it works to free us from the bind of cyclical victimization and violence, against ourselves and others:

The gratuity of God's love works precisely and only as self-giving; working to produce in each human a capacity to accept—as purely gratuitous—the self-giving other. Grace can be lived only as something permanently gratuitously received...If it is true to say that it is more blessed to give than to receive, this is because we are the sort of creatures who can only properly give as part of an imitation of a gratuitous reception.<sup>72</sup>

The gratuitous gift is the love of God, which we accept most fully by accepting his Son, Jesus Christ. The self-giving other who is Christ for us gives not only to the worthy or to

the saint but to the unworthy and the sinner. He offers this love to us not partially or only to the parts of ourselves that are acceptable, but precisely to the demoniac in each of us who wants nothing more than to abdicate from love's reception. We are drawn to God's love like the possessed who runs to Jesus and prostrates himself, and yet, before this love is fully engaged and understood, it is felt more as a torment than a grace. The demoniac is transformed by love, the character of which is definitively different than overcoming evil by reciprocal violence and coercion. This is what Girard is on to and what Alison seizes in his constructive theologizing of the reversal that takes place in the Gospel, where rivalry is flattened by an anterior gesture of self-gift, and a cycle of victim and victimizer curtailed. This cycle is broken only by the offer of love from the victim to the perpetrator, or, as it is commonly known, in the act of forgiveness. This is why conversion and resurrection, which is ultimately what all healing stories in the Gospel are about, are nothing other and nothing less than the offer of love to evil in the gesture of forgiveness, which both disarms and transforms it. The demoniac is therefore only healed and converted by recognizing that he is loved. This gesture has been made to us historically in Christ Jesus and eternally through the Spirit, and as Alison rightly points out, our acceptance of it as the eternal gratuitous gift must precede and inform the space from which our own desire to give emerges. Paradoxically, understanding that this love is without condition is what compels us to expend ourselves on behalf of such love and to share it with others. In the end, in one form or another, we are all demoniacs in search of healing. Our restoral to sanity is only a matter of opening ourselves to the eternally present gesture of a full and radical acceptance.

*Notes:*

Mark 5:1-16 New American Bible.

**1** They came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. **2** When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. **3** The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. **4** In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. **5** Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. **6** Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, **7** crying out in a loud voice, ‘what have you to do with me, Jesus, the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!’ **8** (He had been saying to him, ‘unclean spirit, come out of the man!’) **9** He asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘Legion is my name. There are many of us.’ **10** And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. **11** Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. **12** And they pleaded with him, ‘send us into the swine. Let us enter them.’ **13** And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered into the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. **14** The swineherds ran away and reported the incident in the town and throughout the countryside. And people came out to see what had happened. **15** As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear. **16** Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what happened to the possessed man and to the swine.

<sup>1</sup>William Lane, ‘Gospel According to Mark,’ *The International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 180; Robert Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary* 34A (Dallas: World Books Publisher, 1989) p. 273; Bas M.F. Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary* (London: T & T Clark International, 1998), 198; Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 149.

<sup>2</sup>Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 272-275; Terence Keegan,

*Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 275.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 273, 277. Guelich specifically writes, “The story then underwent midrashic development for mission purposes. Then came the redactional adjustments made at the time of the combining the miracle stories into a pre-Markan collection of miracle stories... Since a crossing would hardly take more than a couple of hours, considerable time had elapsed between the ‘evening’ in 4:35 and the arrival in 5:1-2. But this time gap simply exposes a less than smooth temporal seam created by the combination of two stories that once had existed in unrelated traditional units.”

<sup>5</sup>Cf., Ibid., 274. He specifically writes, “these stories share a thematic and perhaps ironic connection in that Jesus delivers his disciples from death in 4:35-41 by ‘rebuking’ and ‘silencing’ the wind and the sea, language associated with the exorcisms though missing in 5:1-20. Yet he delivers a demon possessed man in 5:1-20 whose deliverance concludes with the demons drowning a herd of swine in the same sea (5:13) from which the disciples had been delivered.”

<sup>6</sup>Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary*, 198.

<sup>7</sup>Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 278.

<sup>8</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 150.

<sup>9</sup>Cf., Lane, “Gospel According to Mark,” 182. What is portrayed is an instance of Lane’s quite literal reading of this story: “The man who was demon possessed is elaborately introduced, perhaps in a manner reflecting the excited report of the townsmen who had long been familiar with his existence...In accordance with the practice of the day they had attempted to bind him by chains to protect themselves from his violence. When this proved to be futile, they had driven him off to wander restlessly in the wild hill country and to dwell in the subterranean caves which served as tombs and dwellings for the poorest people of the district.”

<sup>10</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 150. Guelich also elaborates, “These verses, distinctive to Mark’s account, break with the normal pattern of an exorcism story by detailing the man’s condition. This formal break coupled with the repeated but varied reference to the man’s dwelling and the presence of five *hapax legomena* may sup-

port the thesis that the verses represent a midrashic development of the tradition based on Is 65:4-6. The reference to the tombs in 5:2 and the swine in 5:11 could have provided the key words leading to a midrashic use of these texts." Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 277-278.

<sup>11</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 150; Lane, "Gospel According to Mark," 182; Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 278.

<sup>12</sup>Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 278.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 179; Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 150; Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary*, 199.

<sup>14</sup>Cf., Lane, "Gospel According to Mark," 183. He specifically writes, "The full address is not a confession of Jesus' dignity but a desperate attempt to gain control over him or to render him harmless, in accordance with the common assumption of the period that the use of the precise name of an adversary gave one mastery over him;" Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 150, "At some pre-Markan level, the peculiarity of knowing names and their power has played a role in the story; to know the demon's or exorcist's name gives one power;" Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 279-280, disagrees with the other commentaries, saying, "rather than serve as an apotropeic device for gaining power over the exorcist, an interpretation without literary parallel in exorcisms, this address demonstrates the demoniac's actual recognition of who Jesus is...Jesus asks the name of the unclean spirit. Typically, this request for the name represents a ploy used by the exorcist in gaining control over the spirit. But abdication of control by the unclean spirit from the beginning of this story and the spirit's ready response implies a different function for this question here."

<sup>15</sup>Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary*, 199.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 199; Lane, "Gospel According to Mark," 184; Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 151; Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 279, 280.

<sup>17</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 151, explains that this argument has been especially prominent among liberation theologians, e.g. Myers, *Binding the Strong man*, 190-93, and Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 141-48.

<sup>18</sup>Cf., Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 151. Boring refutes his lengthy assessment of the possibility of a political reading offhandedly and without elaboration. He seems to offer no compelling reasons to disagree but flatly states, “Mark’s explicit interpretation of ‘legion’ is not directly anti-Roman but refers only the vast number of demons inhabiting the poor man.” I do think Boring’s assessment that follows is ultimately correct, even if lacking sufficient prior explanation. Note that he concludes the remark with another reference in favor of a political interpretation: “Thus for Mark, the meaning of the story cannot be reduced to an allegory of liberation from the Romans—its horizon is broader than that, within a cosmic and eschatological framework—but it could hardly have been read in Mark’s time without political overtones.”

<sup>19</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 151.

<sup>20</sup>Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary*, 200.

<sup>21</sup>Cf., Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 281. He specifically writes on 5:9, “On the one hand, this verse explains his uncontrollable behavior in 5:3-4 in terms of the power of the ‘legion.’ On the other hand, the ready submission of the man to Jesus in 5:6 accents Jesus’ power over this extensive force of the demonic. Consequently, this part of the story may also have been added with the expansion of 5:3-6 that elaborated on the man’s extreme predicament. Accordingly, the subject begins to vacillate between the singular ‘I’ and the plural ‘we’ from this point on.”

<sup>22</sup>Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary*, 200; Lane, “Gospel According to Mark,” 185.

<sup>23</sup>Cf., Guelich, *World Biblical Commentary*, 281. He specifically writes, “The reference to a ‘large heard of swine’ feeding on a hill underscores the tone of uncleanness struck at the outset by the man ‘from the tombs’ with an ‘unclean spirit.’ Consequently, it likely belongs to the original story set in the ‘unclean’ land of the Gentiles. Mishnaic law strictly forbade the Jews from raising pigs. The large herd of swine obviously implies the use of pigs for food and/or commercial purposes, and this implication may also have influenced the employment of Isa 65:5 (‘who eat swine flesh’) in the midrashic expansion of the story in 5:3-4.”

<sup>24</sup>Van Iersel, *Mark, A Reader-Response Commentary*, 200.

<sup>25</sup>Lane, “Gospel According to Mark,” 185.

<sup>26</sup>Lane, “Gospel According to Mark,” 187; Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 153.

<sup>27</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 153.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 152; Bryne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark’s Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>30</sup>Cf., Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 152-153. He specifically writes, “It is better not to pose the question within this framework, to grant that neither the Jesus in the story nor Mark the storyteller ever raised such questions, and that the language of the story is to be understood as oriented to the one confessional point of God’s saving act in Christ.”

<sup>31</sup>Bryne, *A Costly Freedom*, 97.

<sup>32</sup>Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean,” in *Mark and Method*, ed. Janice Anderson and Stephen Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 37.

<sup>33</sup>Mark Allen Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 95.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 101; Werner Stenger, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 7.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>René Girard, “The Demons of Geresá,” in *The Daemonic Imagination: Biblical Text and Secular Story*, ed. Robert Detweiler and William G. Doty (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 77.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1998), 15. Alison notes the difference between acquisitive mimesis, which is innocuous and antagonistic mimesis, which leads to group unity at the expense of a victim.

<sup>45</sup>Girard, "The Demons of Geresá," 77-79; Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 12-21.

<sup>46</sup>Girard, "The Demons of Geresá," 77.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 25.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 44.



<sup>65</sup>Diarmuid McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through a Jungian Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 37.

<sup>66</sup>Lane, "Gospel According to Mark," 143.

<sup>67</sup>Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 71.

<sup>68</sup>Jean Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac: A Literary Analysis of Mark 5: 1-20", in *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Dikran Hadidian (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1974), 72.

<sup>69</sup>McGann, *The Journeying Self*, 38.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac," 72.

<sup>72</sup>Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 45.

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