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A table of contents for *Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

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CONTENTS

- 1 **WHAT WENT INTO THE PIGS?-Part 2**
 Taneika Wedderburn
- 19 **KAMALA HARRIS**
 Horace Williams
- 43 **SAM SHARPE**
 D. Vincent Palmer
- 59 **HOME-SCHOOLING STRATEGIES**
 Kimshaw Aiken
- 62 **69TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE UCZ UNIVERSITY**
 GOSNELL L. YORKE
- 67 **GOD & PATOIS IN JAMAICA**
 Oscar Green
- 75 **'RARE CARIBBEAN CHURCH HISTORY'**
 Billy Hall

***'SO WHAT WENT INTO
THE PIGS?'***

Part 2

(Mark 5:1-20)

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**THE SUPERNATURALIST/GRAMMATICO-HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION
OF MARK 5:1-20**

Historical Context of the Narrative

Attention will be presently turned to the grammatico-historical approach which will be used to interpret the Marcan passage under review. This approach, as mentioned previously,¹ is said to be author-centred (see Definition of Terms). It begins with an analysis of the setting of the exorcism account – in a Gentile territory known as the Gerasenes. While this name can be thought to refer to a specific enclave some 37 miles from the Sea of Galilee, it more likely referred to the entire region to which Jesus goes after stilling a storm in the concluding verses of the previous chapter. This geography of this region includes the feature of it being in close proximity to the sea, and it having a steep embankment also nearby. Of all the other textual variants (possibilities), Gerasenes was chosen as the most likely original reading. This is because it has the strongest textual support. It is attested to by both early Alexandrian and Western types². This is significant, as Geisler and Nix point out, when a variant is attested from two separate geographical regions, it is more likely to be trustworthy. They say: “A wide distribution of independent witnesses that agree in support of a variant are generally preferred to those having closer proximity or relationship³”. The fact that the manuscripts are early also makes them more credible. Another reason for accepting “Gerasenes” as the preferred

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² Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 72.

³ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction*

reading is the presence of issues that make the others dubious. Metzger says that the reason that the others were rejected were because of: “the probability that Γαδαρηνων is a scribal assimilation to the prevailing text of Matthew (8.28), and that Γεργεσηνων is a correction proposed by Origen”. In summary, then, Gerasenes has more credible textual attestation while the others have meagre evidence for their preference.

The Gentile region of the Gerasenes is home to pig herders and is also closely associated with the Decapolis. Gentiles and Jews were historically at odds, due in large part to the Jews’ theology which required that they be separate from items and people considered unclean. This meant that, for the Jew, his separation from a non-Jew was thought of, not only as a duty, but as a moral and religious obligation. This centuries-old practice of separation was the cultural backdrop against which this Marcan account occurs. But, not only were Gentiles considered unclean, pigs were in the category of ‘unclean animals’ prohibited from being touched, eaten or associated with. So, throughout Jewish history the Gentile person was discriminated against and coming into contact with pigs was unheard of.

There were, however, glimpses in the Tanakh of the Jewish God reaching out to nations outside of Israel. In the *Nevi'im*, the prophets, Jonah was asked to bring a message from God to the land of Nineveh. This message led to the entire city finding pardon from Him. In this was seen that YAHWEH reached out to a people who were not of Jewish stocks. Other such examples are sprinkled throughout Jewish holy writ, such as his mercy towards Rahab, His reception of the Moabitess, Ruth, and His healing of the Syrian, Naaman. So Mark’s “Son of God” steps onto the foreground with this trail of Jewish history and is born into a nation that continued the separatist tradition of their forefathers and sought to continue the tradition of His Father. While the analysis of the historical context of the actual narrative is vital, the historical context of the pericope is incomplete without an examination of the historical setting of the author. Fee and Stuart concur and point out that the modern day reader also ought to take into account the author’s intended audiences and his reasons for writing to them⁴. This will now become the focus of this paper.

Historical Context of the Author

Mark, a disciple of Peter, one of the original Twelve, is believed by many notable scholars to be the author of the book that bears his name. He evidently wrote to a Roman audience facing persecution. It was written around 50 – 60 years after Jesus’ death when the infamous emperor Nero enacted widespread persecution aimed at the fledgling church. So Mark’s audience seemed to be one that understood persecution and hardship and it was believed that Mark wrote to them in an attempt to provide these believers with comfort during this time.

Biblical/Theological Context of Mark 5:1-20

The pericope belongs to the literary genre designated ‘Gospels’. These multidimensional works have the purpose of displaying the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. The section belongs to a book that some scholars including Tenney⁵ believe is a book that focused more on the acts of Jesus rather than his teachings. Mark therefore presents many accounts of the miracles of Jesus rather than long swathes of didactic

⁴ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. *How to read the Bible for all its worth* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 140.

⁵ Tenney, *New Testament*, 170.

material. In fact, Jesus' teaches almost seem to punctuate accounts of Jesus' miraculous acts.

The account immediately follows Jesus stilling a storm on the Sea of Galilee, an act that reveals Him as the unmistakable Lord over the natural elements. Mark seems to desire to exhibit Jesus as lord over various features of the world, with 5:1-20 showing him as lord over demonic powers. The narrative is then followed by His healing (albeit passively!) of a woman who had been bleeding menstrually for twelve years. In this is seen not only Jesus' dominion over sickness and disease, but also His sheer power that was exuded by the garment in contact with His Body and was dispersed to a believing individual who simply touched His clothes. He was also the only one who could help in a situation that was deemed unrecoverable ("she had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" Mark 5:26). Also sharing Langton's chapter division with the exorcism account, is the narrative about His raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, demonstrating His lordship over death – the perennial enemy of humanity. Jairus' daughter is brought back from what Jesus considered 'sleep', an indication of the ease with which he aroused her from a state that was considered utterly irreversible. The book of Mark then continues by showing the conflict with unbelievers that would lead ultimately to His crucifixion and shows Jesus' suffering at the hand of the Jewish religious establishment.

The Romans who took control of Palestine in 63 B.C. were the ruling authority both during the time of Jesus' ministry and at the time of Mark's writing. He was born into a Roman led Israel, ministered under the watchful eye of the occupying force and was killed by a method they invented. Inextricably linked to the Roman government's method of rulership was the doctrine of Caesar worship. Implicit in this was the idea that the emperor was deity and worthy of veneration. This meant that other religions outside of the state one was considerably stifled and relegated to outlaw status, attracting persecution. They were quite oppressive in their operations and were quite violent and cruel in the methods chosen to punish dissenters. So Mark wrote, revealing Jesus as the Son of God, full of power and worthy of worship. This of course was antithetical to the prevailing Roman doctrine.

Presuppositions of the Grammatico-Historical/ Supernaturalist Approach

Borrowing the designations supplied by Klein et al.⁶, presuppositions of the grammatico- historical approach will be revealed presently. These will be the bases upon which the text will be interpreted. The presupposition about the nature of the Bible about hermeneutics and about its ultimate goal will now be examined.

Presuppositions about the nature of the bible

What can be deemed as the 'orthodox' understanding concerning the nature of the Bible has as its fundamental premise that the Bible is inspired or 'God-breathed'. Along with this theory of inspiration is the idea that it is inerrant in all that it desires to teach. The major verse used in the support of this inspiration is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Geisler and Nix⁷'s monumental work outlines just exactly what this text tries to teach. They posit that the term "all" makes reference to the entire Old Testament, with which, Timothy, his primary audience would be familiar. They also highlight the importance of a second term

⁶ Klein et al., *An Introduction*, viii.

⁷ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction*. 35.

translated “writings”. The implication is that it is the writings that are “inspired”, not the writers. A third term that they note as important to adequate exegesis of the said text is “theopneustos”, translated “inspired”. This word is a participle, which Greek scholars will say is a ‘verbal adjective’ acting like both a verb and an adjective in its grammatical contexts. The significance of this term in the 2 Timothy passage is that it indicates that the very words themselves were breathed out by God, paralleling Jesus’ pronouncement regarding “every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” in Matthew 4:4. It is true, then, that the Scriptures are God’s revelation of Himself to humanity, “breathed out” by God Himself. 2 Peter 1:20-21 is another instance in which the Bible makes reference to its divine origin. This text, taken along with the 2 Timothy passage seem to be the pillars on which this theory of Biblical inspiration and its sister claim of inerrancy rest⁸.

It can seem quite circular that the Bible’s opinion of itself is used to form presuppositions that influence its interpretation, but, scholars turn to proofs, external to the proclamations of the Bible, that indicate the veracity of its claims. One such proof is that of its unity of theme and purpose, despite the fact that it had been written over a period of fifteen centuries. In fairly recent times, individuals have argued against the dating of certain books (or portions thereof) that seem to have given prophecies that have subsequently been fulfilled, indicating that the purported fifteen century gap may in fact be much narrower and the dates of writing might be much closer together.

Another proof that undergirds the presupposition of the Bible’s divine origin is that of predictive prophecies that have been fulfilled in the eras following the closing of the canon. Some scholars cite the following Scripture as the basis for their belief in the authenticity of prophecy: “No prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God” (1 Peter 1:20-21 New Living Translation). This pronouncement apparently shows the claim by the Bible to be a divine book. It speaks specifically of the prophecies in the Bible.

One story is of particular importance as proof of the divinely inspired nature of the Bible. In Daniel 2, Babylon’s king dreamt of a statue whose parts were composed of different materials. Daniel interpreted this, by wisdom given by his God, to be representative of four world powers at different periods of time in world history. The head of fine gold represented Babylon and the breast and arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire. Also, the waist and thighs of bronze (brass) proved to be Greece led by Alexander the Great who, history confirms, used brass extensively for weapons. They overthrew Persia in 332 B.C. and were themselves conquered about 180 years later by the Romans (represented by iron legs and iron and clay feet on the statue). Interestingly, the Roman Empire was split in two as suggested by the two legs of mixed materials. Rome’s dominion lasted 662 years and they had unrivalled military strength in fulfillment of the prophecy that they would be “strong as iron” and will crush all previous empires (verse 40). While some schools of thought seem to discount fulfillment of prophecies that took place within Bible times, those that were fulfilled after the close of the canon seem a bit more difficult to refute. In addition to presupposing the divine nature

⁸ Geisler and Nix provide an excellent treatment of the grammatical considerations that support their conclusion that the translation “all Scripture is inspired” is to be preferred to “all inspired Scripture is of God”. This can be found on pp. 35-36 of *A General Introduction to the Bible* (publication details in bibliography).

of the scriptures, there are also presuppositions that they hold regarding the methodology of Biblical interpretation.

Presuppositions about methodology and the ultimate goal of hermeneutics

The grammatico-historical approach presupposes that the task of the hermeneut is to use various tools to determine the meanings of words as they are in their contexts of the specific texts. The aim, then is to find the intended meaning of the author using word studies in the original languages as well as background studies on the geographical and cultural settings. Fee and Stuart⁹ make it quite clear that the first task of interpretation is ‘exegesis’¹⁰. Their definition presents exegesis as systematic as well as historical in nature, with the aim of finding out the original intent of the author. Grammatico-historical methodology has at its core the view that the author’s original intent is inextricably linked to the meaning of the passage.

It should be obvious that the term ‘grammatico-historical’ is a marriage of terms denoting “grammatical” and “historical”. So, in addition to literary analysis, this methodology presupposes that proper biblical interpretation must involve adequate interaction with the historicity of the texts under review. Klein et al say: “since faith is connected to what happened in history, we commit ourselves to know biblical history even if it conflicts with subsequent church tradition¹¹”. As a footnote to this point they make mention of the Catholic church’s refusal to accept that Jesus had brothers and sisters because they have traditionally held to the perpetual virginity of Mary. Klein et al state categorically that they are unable to accept this doctrine based on the scriptural evidence to the contrary¹². This indicates that the purveyors of the grammatico-historical methodology seem to presuppose that the authority of scripture supersedes any other source of ecclesiastical tradition. ‘Sola Scriptura’ was Luther’s and seems to be the cry of these scholars.

Pursuant to the task of exegesis is learning to do it properly. Scholars from the grammatico-historical school believe that exegesis ought to be done in light of the peculiarities of each genre of biblical writing namely: narrative, gospel, epistle, parable, law, prophets, poetry, wisdom and apocalyptic literature. Each genre has specifically devised rules to ensure proper interpretation. Those of this school therefore presuppose that the genres are identifiable, and that their designations can be interpreted properly using specific rules. One should not think that the hermeneutical task ends when one carries out exegesis, however, since it is deemed only as the first task of interpretation. The second task is ascertaining the relevance of the specific text to the contemporary life of the reader.

Klein et al puts the act of applying texts to the current context only after the one understands the meaning of the texts in their original contexts. They say: “in our view, biblical interpretation succeeds, first, when it enables modern readers to understand the meaning of the original biblical texts – the meaning the people at the time of the texts’ composition (author, editor, audience, readers) would have most likely understood – only

⁹ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 19.

¹⁰ See Definition of Terms for the meaning of this word.

¹¹ Klein et al, *An Introduction*, 152.

¹² *Ibid.*

then seeks its significance for Christians today¹³.” The idea then, is that application proceeds from interpretation and proper application hinges on proper interpretation.

Summary

Assumptions about the nature of the Bible include that it was fully inspired by God, and is authoritative – having the right to proscribe or prescribe human behaviour. Evidence of the Bible’s unity as well as the presence of fulfilled prophecy support this claim of inspiration. The first, all-important step in interpretation is exegesis, an attempt to use various tools to understand what the text meant in its original context. Exegesis’s dependence on various tools should produce objective conclusions about what texts meant in their original contexts – what authors meant for their original audiences to grasp. It is after one sees this that he is qualified to take the next step in the interpretive process, that of applying the truths gleaned from the text to his life – the contemporary setting.

EXEGESIS

The proceeding chapter outlined the presuppositions of the the grammatico-historical approach with its supernaturalist slant. It also established that for that school of interpretation, the presuppositions that the Bible was breathed out by God and that correct interpretation of it will result from proper literary and historical studies of the text. This chapter now focuses on the Marcan text under review. It will be interpreted using the grammatico-historical method and then applications to contemporary life will be made. This will lay the foundation for comparison with the interpretation reached using a reader-response method. For the purposes of this paper, only verses 9-15 will be exegeted, although the exegetical outline of the entire pericope is given below.

Exegetical outline of Mark 5:1-20

- I. The Set Up - 1-5
- II. The Encounter - 6-13a
- III. The Denouement - 13b – 20

Exegesis of Mark 5: 9-15

⁹ *And asked him what is your name? And he is saying to him “Legion is my name, because we are many”*

This verse has Jesus as the subject, taking control of the conversation. He is the one asking the question. One notable grammatical issue is the fact that the singular form *αυτου* is used in reference to his addressee, although the response to the question suggests that a plurality of individuals actually answers the question. Two possible reasons may be put forward to explain this. Firstly, he might have been speaking to the foremost respondent with whom he had been conversing since verse 7 in which the man cried out with *‘φωνη μεγάλη’*. This construction implies that the man cries out, as it is translated, “with a (singular) loud voice”. A second possibility may be that Jesus had been speaking to the man. the allusion to the happenings in verse 7 may also be construed to point to

¹³ Klein et al, *Introduction*, 153.

this conclusion. Notwithstanding, the text seems to suggest that Jesus was simply speaking to the demonic force. It appears that Mark has a penchant for using the singular form when relating how Jesus responds to the one speaking, while using the plural in reference to the words spoken by the demons themselves. A similar linguistic structure is found in Mark 1 on the occasion of another exorcism account in which “he cried”, verse, 23: “let us alone”. Jesus, on this occasion, also, is said to rebuke “him”, the singular construction. The verses in chapter 5, juxtaposed with those in chapter 1 seem to point to the idea that a plurality of demons occupying an individual at any given time.

¹⁰ *and he begged him strongly, so that he would not send them out of the region.*

This verse again raises the grammatical challenges presented in the preceding verse. The “he” in the phrase “he begged” seems to make reference to a demonic force who was the spokesperson for the group, the antecedent being the “him” to whom Jesus referred in verse 9. We see the demon begging Jesus for something. This appears to denote that Jesus had the greater power and authority of the two parties. This can be juxtaposed with the picture painted in preceding verses: that of the strength of the demons (verses 3 – 5) who caused the man to break apart chains. It seems therefore fair to argue that Jesus possessed a greater level of power and authority than demons did; and they knew it.

The request is that he would not send them out of the “χωρας” – region or territory. Strong’s Concordance gives two translations that might suit the context of the verses under review, namely: “the (rural) region surrounding a city or village, the country” and “the region with towns and villages which surround a metropolis”. This would be akin to the suburban areas of many modern nations.

¹¹ *Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside*

The story turns at this point to lead to a major feature of this exorcism account – the pigs. The presence of pigs on such a large scale seems to point to this region being a Gentile territory since the pig is one of the unclean animals named in the Levitical laws. The word used for “herd” is *αγελη*. It has its unique feature in the Bible in this exorcism account, with the word being found only in the parallel accounts of this encounter. It refers to a drove or herd and has its roots in *αγω* which means “to bring or drive¹⁴”. The pigs were feeding on the hillside. The word “βοσκω”, translated “feeding” means “to pasture”, or reflexively, “to graze: feed, keep¹⁵”. This word is also only used in the parallel accounts of this story. One wonders, upon examining this text, what exactly they were feeding on since pigs are not grazing animals. If they were feeding from troughs or other paraphernalia pertinent to pig rearing, is it safe to conclude that they had their home on the hillside? Or is it that they simply went out onto the hillside to feed? But, why? This practise seems different from what usually takes place in settings where pigs are reared and has contributed to the weight of “evidence” cited to support the view that the story is mythical.

¹² *They begged him, saying: “Dispatch us into the swine so that we may go into [into] them”*

¹⁴ James Strong. *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Tennessee: Thomas Nelson. 1996, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 18.

At this point it becomes even more clear who is in authority in this interaction. The demons are “begging” for clemency and choose the swine as their potential new hosts. There appears to be no other instance in Scripture in which demons are sent into another creature when it is exorcised. The use of word ‘πεμψον’ does give a militaristic feel to the act that the demons are asking of Jesus. This word connotes “dispatching”, or “sending” in its simplest sense. It should be noted here that it is the demons that are giving this idea and they seem to want to make their new home the pigs, instead of the man. Their aim was to remain in the territory and this verse demonstrates the large number of demons there were if they could inhabit a large herd of pigs. How dismal was the state of the man, a singular host!

¹³ *and he permitted them and the unclean (or defiling) spirits went out into the swine and that herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand, and drowned in the sea.*

Again, Jesus obviously has the upper hand in this encounter. The active form of the verbs ‘επετρεψεν’, “he permitted” and ‘εσηλθον’ “they went” when juxtaposed, present a vivid word picture: Jesus commands, they obey. The swine are now demonized, and, like the man previously, they begin to act unnaturally and go into a state of mania. This state of mania had not been there prior to Jesus’ permission being granted for the demons to enter them, they had previously been simply feeding on the hillside. The difference between them feeding and then them rushing madly into the body of water was profound. They were now uncontrollable and it was as if a GPS device leads them to their destruction as they all go as one herd into the sea where they are drowned. One wonders how this state of mania seemed, as it did with the man, always seems to lead to self destructive practices. The influence of the demons in both instances led to unnatural behaviour and to self-destruction.

¹⁴ *and their herdsmen ran away and told [it] in the city and in the countryside and they came to understand (or to see) what is happening.*

The passage indicates that there were many herdsmen demonstrated by the large geographical area to which the message was spread, as well as the speed with which the news traveled. They went to both the countryside, a more rural part of the area is indicated by the word ‘αγρους’ as well as ‘πολιν’ what is a more urbanized region. There seems to be a deliberate juxtaposition of the two different settlement types indicating the extent to which the word travelled. This lends some support to the idea that what is referred to as the ‘Gerasenes’ carries the idea of a region, not just a town. The people then come to see, ιδειν, which can be translated “to understand” or “to experience”. Either translation conveys the idea that the citizens wanted to become eyewitnesses to what had taken place.

¹⁵ *and they come to Jesus and they see the demon-possessed man sitting down, clothed and in his right mind (the one who had the legion) and they were afraid.*

The people of the region then come out to see for themselves what has happened. Mark goes to great lengths to identify the man whom they see when they arrive – him who had the legion. But what a difference they see in this man, whom they recognize as their formerly violent, uncontrollable neighbour. For one, he is now clothed. He is no longer naked. This idea of his now being clothed seems to represent a sort of reintegration into the socially acceptable as being unclothed in a public setting could indicate unsoundness of mind. His being clothed indicates that he was once again in his “right mind”.

As a result of the change they saw, the people were afraid. Contra Roper¹⁶, this writer believes that their fear could have been a sort of reverence that made them feel unworthy of Jesus' presence among them. It may have been similar to Peter's feeling after seeing the great miraculous catch of fish that Jesus provides. While Luke 5 uses θαμβος, translated 'amazement' to refer to what Peter and the other men felt when they saw Jesus' actions, Jesus' direct address to Peter uses 'φοβοῦ', the same word used in the Marcan passage. Jesus there tells Peter to "Fear not" as a result of seeing the miracle. The fear the people felt may have been due to the sheer power that they have just been made aware of.

So, what went into the pigs?

The grammatico-historical school would answer this with the word: demons. The result of the exorcism was the fact that the demons, who once inhabited the un-named man, were now homeless. Their quest to not leave the region caused them to be sent into the nearby swine, who then went into a mania and rushed into the sea where they drowned. Their drowned was linked to the man's deliverance from the demons.

THE ANTISUPERNATURALIST/SOCIO-LITERARY INTERPRETATION OF MARK 5:1-20

Presuppositions of the Anti-Supernaturalist/ Socio-Literary Approach

In chapter 3, the presuppositions of the grammatico-historical hermeneutical method were outlined, and in the previous chapter, grammatico-historical methodology was used to exegete the text and to proffer an answer regarding what happened to the pigs. In this chapter, the methodology and conclusions of its socio-literary counterpart will be revealed. The presuppositions about the nature of the Bible, about hermeneutics and about its ultimate goal will now be examined.

Presuppositions about the nature of the Bible

Even a cursory reading can reveal that the ideas about the nature of the Bible is divided into theological camps, each having its own set of views that are said to be defensible. It is therefore prudent to point out here that convergence in the ideas about the nature of the bible surround whether it is fully or partially inspired by God, or if it is even inspired at all. Pursuant to any discussion about the nature of the Bible is the question of what bearing the words of the sacred text has on the lives of its readers. It is here that one enters what seems to be a theological labyrinth, complete with different pathways that lead to conclusions that are far removed from each other and from those of the verbal – plenary view of inspiration espoused by the traditional approach.

¹⁶ Roper says: "In the resolution, Jesus is asked to leave the region by the self appointed gatekeepers of the region". He sees this negatively, as their valuing the pigs/ their livelihood over and against the well-being of the man. See Garnett Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology* (Kingston: Xpress Litho, 2012), 117.

For one thing, liberalists presuppose that “the Bible is not the pure word of God”¹⁷, but is a collection of “intensely human documents¹⁸”. The Bible, they contend, contains passages that contradict each other or “well established knowledge¹⁹”. Harold DeWolfe, a leading twentieth century liberal theologian, quite eloquently presents the argument in words quoted and paraphrased by Geisler and Nix. He says:

The writing of the Bible as a whole was accomplished by an extraordinary stimulation and elevation of the powers of men who devoutly yielded themselves to God’s will and sought, often with success unparalleled elsewhere, to convey truth useful to the salvation of men and nations. However, the human fallibility of the Bible does not preclude the possibility of its divine inspiration nor of its unmatched moral and religious authority²⁰.

The book itself, then, while possessing some kernels of truth, is replete with errors. Inspiration, then, is not plenary, but applies only to some portions of the text. Indeed, it could be argued that even Jesus Himself seems to have thrown out portions of the sacred text of the Old Testament. This is exemplified by his use of “you have heard it said” sayings in the Gospels, which are usually accompanied by his reversal of or doing away with Old Testament prohibitions and prescriptions. Geisler and Nix aptly summarise the presuppositions of this school when they say: “In brief, the Bible merely contains the Word of God, along with many errors. One must use human reason along with the ‘spirit of Christ’ in order to determine which parts of Scripture are true and which are false”²¹.

Also being quite vocal in his liberal ideology and hence presuppositions about the Scriptures is Harry Emerson Fosdick. Like DeWolfe, he rubbishes the idea that events such as miracles have occurred, contending instead that “the liberal emphasis rests on experience²²”. The idea, then, is that the Bible, by nature, is not a moral guide. In fact it cannot be. Fosdick astutely highlights the source of the liberalist’s rejection of the Bible by saying: “Get back to the nub of their difficulty and you find it in Biblical categories which they no longer believe – miracles, demons, fiat creation, apocalyptic hopes eternal hell, or ethical conscience²³”. These thinkers no longer believe these ideas because of the pervasive materialist ideology. Brunner seems to concur when he asserts quite strongly, that “the orthodox doctrine of Verbal Inspiration has been finally destroyed. It is clear that there is no connection between it and scientific research and honesty: we are forced to make a decision against the view”.

Shubert Ogden was also instrumental in articulating the presuppositions of liberals concerning the nature of the Scriptures. He purports that the Bible is not the supreme authority for faith, but simply is authoritative in pointing the person to Christ. For the liberal theologian, the aim of the Scriptures is not to be authoritative, neither should it be taken as such, but it is to point to the person of Christ.

¹⁷ Harold DeWolfe, *The Case for Theology in Liberal Perspectives*, Westminster: Philadelphia. 1959, 17. quoted in Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction*, 166.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction*, 166.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Modern Use of the Bible*, p 183. Quoted in Geisler and Nix, p. 167.

²³ Ibid. p. 5.

The Bible, at a glance, seems to be replete with prophecy, so this examination about the presuppositions about the nature of the Bible now turns its attention to the seemingly prophetic ethos of Scripture. It contains what seem to be prophetic utterances, but liberalists do not believe that they are to be taken as literal predictions of future events. Lewis Ford says: “Prophecy is not prediction, but the proclamation of divine intent, dependent for its realisation upon the continued presence of those conditions which called forth that intent²⁴”. Prophecy then is a disclosure of the divine will. Such pronouncements as Lewis’s seem to remove from it the supernatural element, that is, the workings of God performing acts that are beyond the human ability. In sum, the prevailing presupposition is that the Bible is not divine, but is a document crafted by human hands, containing God’s historical dealings with mankind, with the aim of pointing the reader to God.

Presuppositions about methodology and the ultimate goal of hermeneutics

Not only has the presupposition about the nature of the Bible influenced the interpretation of the Marcan text, but the socio-literary methodology has also led the hermeneut to various conclusions about the text. Contrasting the grammatico-historical emphasis on the “world behind the text”, that is, the historical context of the passage, the leaning of this school is the “world in front of the text”, meaning the context of the reader. To the claim that this approach robs the interpreter of the ability to look at the text objectively comes the contention that objectivity is impossible. The quest for objectivity has unfortunately historically led to detachment from the text by the reader. Myers contends that this is unnecessary, saying instead that “interpretation is a conversation between text and reader, requiring not detachment but involvement²⁵”. This has led Myers to what he calls the “Hermeneutical circle”. His argument is that one has to allow the text to “interpret us”, that is, influence our life situation, and the reader’s life situation in turn influences the meaning of the text. This has come to be known in theological circles as the reader-response method.

Michael Delahoyde²⁶ defines it well as: “a school of criticism which emerged in the 1970s, focused on finding meaning in the act of reading itself and examining the ways individual readers or communities of readers experience texts”. It therefore allows the reader to join with the author “to help the text mean”.

Proponents of the reader-response contend that this method, “is not a subjective, impressionistic free-for-all, nor a legitimizing of all half-baked, arbitrary, personal comments on literary works²⁷” instead, one has to espouse a hermeneutics of suspicion²⁸ in which he interprets the interpreter examining exactly which *a priori* biases he possesses that have led him to the conclusions he makes. At this juncture, Myers stridently says: “this suspicion may be applied not only to the ideas of the interpreter but to their social class and political commitments in the real world as well²⁹”. One then

²⁴ Lewis Ford, “Biblical Recital and Process Philosophy”. *Interpretation* 26, 2, April 1972, 206. Quoted in Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction*, 169.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Michael Delahoyde. ‘Reader-Response Criticism’. Washington State University. <https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/reader.crit.html>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Myers, *Political*, 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

needs to admit his own ideological commitments adopted consciously or otherwise based on his social class as well as various historical realities that have come to bear upon his set of preunderstandings about biblical interpretation. Ricoeur agrees and makes it clear that “adequate use of suspicion and self-criticism in hermeneutics is essential if we are not to worship idols, by projecting our own wishes and images onto revelation³⁰”.

Perhaps the feature that most distinguishes the reader-response methodology from another is its emphasis on the reader’s taking some form of action having read the passage. Myers’ hermeneutic circle is hence incomplete without decided action from the reader by applying the text to his life situation. He says that while not discounting the contributions of ancient studies to biblical scholarship: “until the circle from context to text and back to context is completed, we cannot be said to have truly interpreted the text³¹”. So, whatever other schools of thought that refer to “application” (separate from interpretation), the proponents of the reader-response method hold their system as an integral part of the interpretive process. The ultimate aim of hermeneutics, then, is to allow the text to change one’s life situation and produce meaningful action.

Socio-Literarist Interpretation of Mark 5:1-20

Much of the alternative readings of Mark tend to be materialist and political in nature. A major argument about Mark’s intent for writing tends to be the author’s perceived focus on the plight of the marginalised of Jesus’ day. Roper, in fact, plainly calls it an “anti-establishment document”³² Diehl notes it well when she argues that “this Gospel uniquely gives a voice to ordinary people, particularly peasants and villagers in Galilee and the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire³³”.

The political and materialist readings also place much emphasis on the reality of Roman oppression in Jesus’ Palestine. Indeed, during that time, the emperor was akin to deity and was venerated. His decrees and statutes would then be tantamount to holy writ. The fact that he was held in such high esteem naturally meant that he had absolute power, one which many Roman emperors wielded at whim. This certainly led to widespread oppression of conquered peoples and a general feeling of helplessness amongst these groups. Many interpreters find many parallels between the political reality of Jesus’ day and the plight of marginalised groups in many cultures across the globe. The Caribbean is one such geo-cultural area found to possess similarities to the Palestine of Jesus’ day.

Perhaps the largest body of work produced in the Caribbean on the demoniac at the Gerasenes belongs to Garnett Roper. In an attempt to produce a Caribbean theology that would be suitable also as a public theology, Roper uses the account of the demoniac to demonstrate the plight of colonised, oppressed peoples, like those in the Caribbean. He believes that Mark 5 plays a pivotal role in understanding the mission of Jesus as expounded in the entire Marcan account. He says:

The chapter brings together key elements of the Gospel of Jesus the Son of God as they are seen through these miracle stories of Jesus who through

³⁰ Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Michigan: Zondervan, 1992, 5.

³¹ Myers, 5.

³² Garnett Roper, *Caribbean Theology as Public Theology*. Kingston: Xpress Litho. 2012, 95.

³³ Judith Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament”, in *Jesus is Lord Caesar is not*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph Modica (Illinois: Intervarsity, 2003), 47.

the grace and power of the Kingdom of God confronts the realities of alienation and oppression, distortion and marginalization, death and despair which were a part of the lived experience of empire³⁴.

Using this as a springboard, Roper launches into a treatise on the chapter. He sees as an overarching theme of the chapter the obstinate uncooperativeness of the “powers” towards “Jesus and his mission of transformation³⁵”. Roper further contends that the experience of the people in the region of the Gerasenes, under Roman occupation, is similar to the experiences of those in post-colonial societies³⁶. He also views the pericope (Mark 5:1-20) as providing the reader with the opportunity to engage the idea of “demon-possession” with “the utmost sobriety³⁷” and sees ‘Legion’ as reminiscent of the “distortion of identity and the interiorization of anger and oppression³⁸”. Needless to say, Roper is not of the view that those comprising “Legion” are disembodied spirits but rather that Mark’s references to ‘demons’ and ‘evil spirits’ are part of “a hidden transcript which were ways of speaking about empire and a way of betraying the oppression by evil forces upon the lives of the people³⁹.” He therefore suffuses this account of the freeing of the demoniac with military imagery. For him, then, ‘Legion’ coincides with the idea of a military platoon such as that which is a feature of the Roman army. This idea of ‘Legion’ will be dealt with more fulsomely later.

Roper evidently had read Fernando Belo’s *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* and was heavily influenced by Belo’s hermeneutic. In what seemed to be the quintessence of the book, Belo proclaims that in reading and interpreting Markan “priority will be given to the ‘words’, the *logia* of Jesus, the *ipsissima verba*, while the narratives of his powerful practice will become secondary as a result of the rationalistic expulsion of the miraculous from ‘history’⁴⁰. It is clear that Belo views any intimation of miraculous interventions as irrational and so, to him, what Jesus said is more important than what he reputedly did.

The socio-literary reading of Mark 5, based on the foregoing, obviously has as its emphasis the oppressive socio-political setting of the world in which Mark wrote. For the exponents of this view, there is what they call a ‘hidden transcript’ and Mark 5:1-20 ought to be understood in light of this transcript. Also of note, in this school of interpretation, Legion and exorcism are seen only as symbolic. The attention of this paper now turns to the hidden transcript of the Marcan text.

The Hidden Transcript

Mark is an antiestablishment document. This seems to be the theme, providing the lenses through which Mark is interpreted. The entire book, it is argued, is aimed at portraying Jesus as one who went against the *status quo ante* and acted in ways that were

³⁴ Garnett Roper. “Mark 5 and Caribbean Theology”. *Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology* (2015): 21.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁷ Ibid, 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁰ Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1981), 240.

contrary to the prevailing views and practices of his day. His constant criticism of the religious establishment seems to provide proof of this⁴¹. Roper is quite strident in articulating his viewpoint that Mark does not present a reformist but revolutionary strategies. Hence, Jesus in Mark is to be seen as one who has come to enact deep, often upsetting changes to the prevailing happenings of his day. All areas of Mark, in general, and the Legion narrative in particular are to be seen against this background – Jesus was a revolutionary. Myers takes it further than a simple identification with the message, however, and sees Mark’s writing as a manifesto written to those committed to God’s work of justice⁴².

The narrative itself is an account of an exorcism, which socio-literary scholars argue, like all other exorcism accounts, speaks allegorically about “Roman imperial occupation of the land⁴³”. It is along this vein that its proponents argue that a hidden transcript permeates the Marcan writing. To them, the stories of exorcism, including the one under review, are to be read as more than simply stories of “demons and disembodied spirits⁴⁴” but they point to, as Myers notes, the “binding of the strong man⁴⁵” in Mark 3, the “strong man” of course being the Roman occupying force that must be bound and cast out and in the Legion narrative, “Jesus inaugurates another round of powerful symbolic action in his ministry of liberation⁴⁶. Horsely summarizes the view by proposing that the exorcism of Legion is “about ‘what’s happening’ in the lives of the people in Galilee and round about”. He adds that “the original hearers would have recognized immediately that ‘Legion’ referred to Roman troops. For in their recent experience, Roman legions had burned villages round such towns as Magdala and Sepphoris and slaughtered or enslaved thousands of their parents and grandparents.”⁴⁷ The notion, then, is that though the ideas are encoded, Mark’s original audience would be able to decipher the meaning of the terms used to convey his message.

Mark wrote at a time when these Hellenistic styles would have been accepted and known and even expected. One is able to compare what socio-literary scholars believe Mark does to what the Greek fabulist Aesop does circa 600 B.C. It could be argued that the use of fabulous language and style would not have been foreign to the readers (although the genesis of fables pre-date the Greeks⁴⁸). The use of animals and objects to enshrine immortal truths for humanity seems to bear resonance, some believe, with the Marcan use of demons and pigs. One particular fable attributed to Aesop can serve to aptly illustrate the point:

A Hare was making fun of the Tortoise one day for being so slow.
“Do you ever get anywhere?” he asked with a mocking laugh.

⁴¹ Roper, *Caribbean Theology*, 96-7.

⁴² Myers, *Political*, 11.

⁴³ Roper, 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 93.

⁴⁵ Myers’ landmark text on Mark bears the name: *Binding the Strong Man*. It appears that he sees this Mark 3 pronouncement as the thesis of Mark’s Gospel.

⁴⁶ Myers, 190.

⁴⁷ Richard Horsely, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 100, quoted in Roper, *Caribbean Theology*, 102.

⁴⁸ John Horgan “Aesop’s Fables”. Ancient History Encyclopedia, 2014, <http://www.ancient.eu/article/664/>.html.

“Yes,” replied the Tortoise, “and I get there sooner than you think. I’ll run you a race and prove it.”

The Hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the Tortoise, but for the fun of the thing he agreed. So the Fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off.

The Hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the Tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try a race with a Hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the Tortoise should catch up.

The Tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the Hare was sleeping. But the Hare slept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the Tortoise was near the goal. The Hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the Tortoise in time⁴⁹.

Aesop’s hearers, like Mark’s, would be familiar with the characters in the fable, and recognise the juxtaposition of the speed of the hare with the slowness of the tortoise. They could hence make the necessary associations between the fable and their lived experience. Horgan makes this point about Aesop’s fables: “The subversive nature of the tales allowed the lower classes in Greek society a means of escape from a society which was often oriented around the idea that ‘might makes right’”⁵⁰ Having Aesop’s style as an antecedent, it could be argued that Mark used a similar allegorical style, complete with a similar penchant to favour the oppressed, to make his point. Socio-literary proponents would also agree that just as “Aesop did not restrict the animals to behaving in a manner generally associated with that particular animal”⁵¹, allowing for “the animals to appear in other settings acting in different manners”; so did Mark, using pigs in a way to simply make a point⁵².

Important symbols used by Mark in his allegory

Having established the ‘hidden transcript’ behind Mark’s writing, attention will now be turned to the interpretation that socio-literary analysts have arrived at, having examined 5:1-20. As the name suggests, a socio-literary analysis holds in tandem both the social and literary components of a text. In the narrative, Jesus’ going over to “the other side”, has been a major point of examination for these scholars, lending weight to their argument that Mark uses much symbolism. Myers tentatively argues that the discrepancy concerning the place name⁵³ is easily resolved by viewing it as Mark’s attempt to establish “‘the other side of the sea” as gentile socio-symbolic space”⁵⁴. They are therefore not very concerned about the specific place name; instead they recognize the symbolism of it. More evidence can be found, however, that this space is decidedly gentile – that of the man living among the tombs. Levitical laws had long disallowed Jews from association with dead bodies, with the result that ritual defilement would occur. The presence of pigs, unclean animals, was also an indicator that Jesus was acting amongst non-Jews.

⁴⁹ Tom Simondi, “Fables of Aesop”. 2014. <https://fablessofaesop.com/the-hare-and-the-tortoise.html>

⁵⁰ Horgan, 2014.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² More will be said on the use of “herd” of pigs below.

⁵³ See Part 1 for a full treatment of the controversy concerning whether Gadarenes, Gerasenes or Gergesenes is to be taken as the preferred reading.

⁵⁴ Myers, Political, 190.

The man living among the tombs who meets Jesus on the other side is representative of the deranged psyche of those living under oppressive regimes. Mark is using allegory here to portray “the effect of Roman power on the lived experience of the people, life-distorting, life-diminishing and life-destroying”⁵⁵. The man, under the control of Legion is unrestrainable. It is as if he is totally at the mercy of a powerful brute force and has no hope of recourse and has begun to act in sub-human ways. Roper puts it this way: “the sense of the invincibility of the forces of oppression, the loss of the sense of themselves and their sense of place, and their marginalization and disorientation were also being conveyed by the narrative”⁵⁶. In the man among the tombs, then, is seen a powerful metaphor for the state of persons living under brutal oppression from occupying forces. When he meets Jesus, he calls out Jesus’ title and begs for clemency. Interestingly Jesus does not silence him and Belo believes this was because there was no crowd⁵⁷ (hence no need to protect the ‘Messianic Secret’⁵⁸). Myers believes that Jesus subsequently wrests from the demon the power to name Him by asking the demon his name.

Legion

It is at this point on which much of the socio-literary argument for the interpretation of the passage to suggest Roman oppression hinges. The demon’s answer of “Legion”, it is thought, points unarguably to a large group of Roman soldiers. Myers stridently asserts that this Latin term “had only one meaning in Mark’s social world: a division of Roman soldiers”⁵⁹. It is thought then, that it is the occupation by this force that dehumanizes the man. Legion is the ‘hands and feet’ of the oppressive Roman government whose infamy relating to their brutality is unmistakable. Mark wants to put into the minds of his readers, by his metaphorical use of the word, that this man’s wretched state is due to the actions of the empire. Socio-literarists therefore seem to suggest that it is no mistake that Mark uses this very familiar word to illustrate a point.

The pigs

The presence of pigs in the story is another aspect that socio-literary analysts have cited to buttress their interpretation. One author comments that the Greek term transliterated *agele* and translated “herd” is not appropriate when speaking of pigs since they do not travel in herds; however, this term has been used to refer to military recruits⁶⁰. Belo calls the inclusion of such concepts as “unclean spirits”; “swine”; and “drowned in the sea” a series of pollutions⁶¹. It is unclear what he means by “pollutions”. It could be that he deems them pollutions of the original narrative by a redactor or some other source. While it is not easy to discern what he means, it is much less difficult to realise that his hermeneutic calls for interpreting the text from a materialist viewpoint rather than an immaterialist (i.e. supernaturalist) one.

⁵⁵ Roper, 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 104.

⁵⁷ Belo, 129.

⁵⁸ The Messianic secret is the belief that “Jesus is frequently portrayed as seeking to maintain an element of secrecy about his own person and work”. (Christopher Tuckett, ed. *Issues in Religion and Theology 1: The Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

⁵⁹ Myers, 191.

⁶⁰ Duncan Derrett, “Contributions to the study of the Gerasene demoniac.” *JSNT*, 3, pp 5ff. Quoted in Myers, *Political*, 191.

⁶¹ Ibid, 129.

Also examining the literary aspect of Mark's work, socio-literarists point to his use of the term "*epetrepesen*" translated "he dismissed them". This word, it is believed, is suffused with military imagery, reminiscent of the command by a superior officer to his underlings. The result of this dismissal is that the pigs ran down the steep cliff to their deaths. The word "*ormesen*", Myers believes, should be translated "charged" and suggests "troops rushing into battle"⁶². The result, though, is the demise of the pigs and this is where the argument turns to the denouement of the narrative. The drowning of the pigs caused the herdsmen to go into the city and tell of what they had seen. When the people see the restored man, they ask Jesus to leave.

The use of exorcism in Mark

Socio-literary interpretation of the Marcan account has attributed particular significance to his use of the allegory of exorcism. For them, exorcisms are unmistakably about Roman oppression, but they do not see in the allegories any reference to single individuals, but rather, exorcisms refer to a collective liberation that Jesus wants to inaugurate. To this discussion, Roper provides an excellent introduction when he says: "there is an emerging consensus among recent scholars that exorcisms in general and the Legion narrative in Mark 5:1-20 in particular were about Roman imperial occupation of the land."⁶³ The collective nature of Mark's allegorical use of demonic oppression, it is argued, has parallels in the realm of social psychology. It is argued that in situations of political oppression, "demon possession in traditional societies is often a reflection of 'class antagonism rooted in economic exploitation' or 'a socially accepted form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppression'"⁶⁴. This, some interpreters seem to argue, finds kinship with Mark's allegorical representation.

Another argument for reading this particular narrative as speaking of Roman oppression and occupation, is the parallels that some have found between 5:1-20 and the exorcism done in the synagogue in chapter 1. They suggest that the Mark 5 account is part 2 in the revelation of Jesus as an anti-establishment figure, with part 1 being his confrontation of the religious elite in the synagogue. The argument is that Mark first establishes Jesus as antithetical to the oppressive regime of the holy men, who were quite antagonistic toward the plight of the common man, and then reveals him as opposed to all things oppressive.

Summary

A priori ideas about the nature of the bible account for the conclusions drawn by interpreters of the antisupernaturalist/liberal school. They believe that the bible does not have verbal inspiration, but rather, it contains or becomes the word of God.⁶⁵ It is therefore a human book useful, however for pointing one to Christ. For the liberalist, one has to navigate the bible using human reason since it is obvious that the myths and imagery in the text are simply to prove points. The bible is therefore not authoritative and cannot be taken at face value but requires much scrutiny to uncover fundamental truths. These truths are unearthed by readers who bring to the reading of the text their own biases. As such a hermeneutics of suspicion has to be used in order to examine conclusions drawn from a passage. Interpretation is linked to what some schools of

⁶² Myers, 191.

⁶³ Roper, 102.

⁶⁴ Myers, 192.

⁶⁵ Editorial note: This sounds more like the Neo-orthodox view; Liberals tend to be more radical than that.

thought call application and without it, interpretation is incomplete. Myers produces an excellent summation: “from the perspective of radical discipleship, ‘biblical authority’ is meaningful insofar as it leads us to repentance and resistance!”⁶⁶

So, what went into the pigs?

From a socio-literary standpoint, the answer to the theme question seems quite difficult to locate. However, based on the foregoing, a few possibilities may be proffered. Firstly, it could be thought that the pigs were simply allegorical representations of the Roman oppressors. The use of swine to depict the enemy seems quite plausible. A second possibility is that the presence of the swine in the narrative was simply a late insertion made into to the text, or an unrelated occurrence that was unfortunately added to the narrative. Next time we will complete our investigation by comparing the grammatico-historical and socio-literary methodologies.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 9.