

From the Heart Come Forth Words and Deeds that Defile

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I

At our center for Ethics & Culture conference on the poor, three years ago, I spoke about the Gospel sayings “Blessed are the poor” and “Blessed are the poor in spirit”, and about the state of Catholic scripture scholarship 50 years after the Second Vatican Council unequivocally reaffirmed that the four gospels are historically trustworthy, because written by eyewitness apostles or the associates of eyewitness apostles writing always with the intent of honestly conveying nothing but true propositions, drawn from their memory or the testimony of eyewitnesses, about what Jesus really said and did down to his ascension. I suggested fifteen causes¹ for the very widespread defection from that teaching among Catholic scripture scholars since then, none of these causes being also a justifying reason for rejecting, as so many do, one of the most fundamental teachings of the Catholic faith, a teaching proposed at all times, and by Vatican II, as a truth accessible to the inquiries and judgments of reason as well as a truth of the faith.

Since then I have been seeking when I can to deepen my outsider’s understanding of the ways the dominant scholarship is historically and philosophically defective and unreasonable, and more important my outsider’s understanding of the evidence that enables us to make reasonable judgments about what in historical probability must have been preached and taught by the Apostles during the first three to five years after Easter; and about how the content of *that* teaching and preaching should be judged to have been carried forward orally in basically stable but not invariant forms until, with some rearrangement and commentary but no substantial amendment of what had been orally transmitted, it was written out in the Aramaic and Greek gospel documents we now know, at least

¹ See n. 54 below.

in Greek: the gospels “according to” *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John*. So when I was invited to talk here again, in this conference on morality and the human heart, I thought it might be interesting to take – as another test case to drill down into – the arguably most important gospel teaching on the heart. It is in *Matthew* 15. 1–20 and *Mark* 7. 1–23, but not *Luke* or *John*. Here, omitting six verses along the way for brevity, is *Mark’s* version. Of the two it is the better, I think, in communicating the full sense of what Jesus did on the day in question, as I will later explain. I will read it in the modern way in the New American Bible Revised Edition that the US bishops have adopted for liturgical use; but I will change the word “meal(s)” to “bread” or when plural, “loaves of bread”, to fit the Greek more literally. (Later I will read the last part of it to you again, in a form closer to what I believe would have been memorized by many preachers and teachers as they spread out from Jerusalem, north, east, west and south in the first and later decades after Easter.)

¹Now when the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ²they observed that some of his disciples ate their [loaves of bread] with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands.

³(For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. ⁴And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles [and beds].)

⁵So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, “Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat [bread] with unclean hands?”

⁶He responded, “Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written [Is 29. 13]:

‘This people honors me with their lips, / but their hearts are far from me;

⁷In vain do they worship me, / teaching as doctrines human precepts.’

⁸You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." ⁹He went on to say, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition!

¹⁰For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Whoever curses father or mother shall die.' ¹¹Yet you say, 'If a person says to father or mother, "Any support you might have had from me is qorban"' (meaning, dedicated to God), ¹²you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother. ¹³You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things."

¹⁴He summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile." ^[16] Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear.

¹⁷ When he got home away from the crowd his disciples questioned him about the parable. ¹⁸He said to them, "Are even you likewise without understanding? Do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, ¹⁹ since it enters not the heart but the stomach and passes out into the latrine?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰"But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. ²¹ From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, ² unchastity, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. ²³ All these evils come from within and they defile."

II

Did this confrontation and teaching moment ever occur? Did Jesus ever say this? A local exemplar of much scholarship firmly answers No, and after criticizing that answer and finding it unjustified, I will consider what Jesus did with that teaching moment, its permanent significance for ethical theory but also for understanding the information now available to us about becoming persons fit for a more lasting city than this world.

² The translators' inclusion of evil thoughts in the list as its first item, rather than as the genus of the 12 items listed, is a mistranslation of *Mark*, though not of the partly similar passage in *Matthew*: see at n. 47 below.

In *A Marginal Jew*, the five-volume *magnum opus* (projected seven-volumes) on the historical Jesus (in large measure researched and written within a few hundred yards of here) you will find that in volume IV (2009), *Law and Love*, ch. 35, “Jesus and Purity Laws,” there are 135 pages (citing 300 books and articles in the chapter’s first endnote) developing arguments for the chapter’s conclusion: the whole of the passage I just read is made up. (Bultmann offered a rather similar line of argumentation in 1921, in less than a page (pp. 7–8) which expanded by the third edition in 1957 to a page and a third (pp. 15–17) of his *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*.)³

None of it goes back to Jesus (and *Matthew’s* account, being entirely reliant on *Mk* for information or would-be information, has no more historical authenticity): at no point are we hearing Jesus; the essential propositions in the passage are ones we have no reason to think he uttered. Indeed, taking into account the evidence of what happened in the 40–50 years before Mark and Matthew wrote, we should judge that Jesus *could not* have asserted the essential propositions, whatever the wording. It is all an invention of some Christian community, we know not where, sometime during the forty years before anyone got around to writing a gospel. And the striking additions in *Matthew* are just more embroidery by some other Christian community or editor, pulled in while the redactor of *Matthew* is working through *Mark* as if with a word processor, reorganizing and tightening up.

The chapter’s arguments, though lengthy, are clear, and are entirely unsuccessful. In a longer version of this lecture (i.e. the version that includes the single-spaced sections) I discuss three primary arguments. The short version is this.

1. *A Marginal Jew* claims that Jesus could not have used the *Isaiah* passage as quoted in *Mk* and *Matt*. For his use of it depends on the Greek translation of *Isaiah*, which, even if he knew it, Jesus could not have deployed in his controversy with Pharisees to make his contrast between divine law and human tradition.

The book’s claim is that the quotation from *Isaiah* can’t go back to Jesus because it employs, with some adjustment, the Septuagint Greek translation not the Hebrew; and the Hebrew text would not work to make Jesus’s point; and the idea

[t]hat an Aramaic-speaking Jesus [with only “tradesman’s Greek if any]..., arguing with Pharisees noted for their careful

³ See also Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, rev. ed. (NY: Harper & Row, 1968), 17–18.

study of the (Hebrew) Scriptures, would, in the middle of a theological debate, suddenly burst into Greek with a citation of the [Septuagint]—precisely to make a point not present in the Hebrew form of Isaiah—stretches credulity beyond the breaking point.⁴

This claim fails, because any known Hebrew version⁵ gave Jesus quite enough for his argument, and indeed each version contains the very same phrase as the Greek does, the phrase “precepts [or commandment(s)] of men,” which Jesus’ argument then treats as functionally equivalent to “traditions of men.” Jesus’ argument works identically whatever translation he used – Greek, or Hebrew versions, or some Aramaic (popular translation) then extant⁶ and perhaps closer to the Greek. For in no known version does the *Isaiah* passage speak of tradition, yett Jesus deploys the quotation to segue to the idea of tradition (for instance, tradition of the kind the local Pharisees had appealed to against his disciples).

A Marginal Jew cites but rejects the view of various scholars who think the Hebrew text is sufficient to make or support Jesus’ points:

Despite claims [e.g. Pesch, France, Guelich] to the contrary, the Hebrew form of Isa 29:13 does not serve the precise claim Jesus is making in Mark 7:6–13. The reason why this is so is that the Hebrew form of Isa 29:13 does not contain a denunciation of teachers who teach mere human commandments and doctrines...⁷

But the Hebrew contains a denunciation of treating the commandments of God, addressed to the heart, as if they were mere

⁴ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, IV, *Law and Love* (Yale UP, 2009), 376.

⁵ Hebrew text (*A Marginal Jew* IV, 370):

And the Lord said, “Because this people approaches [me] with its mouth,
and with its lips they honor me,
but its heart is far from me,
and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned [by rote] ...

Cf. *Orthodox Jewish Bible*: “...their fear toward Me is mitzvat anashim melummadah (human commandments taught by rote)”; NABRE: “Since this people draws near with words only / and honors me with their lips alone, / though their hearts are far from me, / And fear of me has become / mere precept of human teaching;” NAB: “...routine observance of the precepts of men;” NRSV: “...a human commandment learned by rote.”

⁶ The *surviving* targum of *Isaiah* does not differ from the Hebrew in ways that affect the present argument, though Thomas R. Hatina, “Did Jesus Quote Isaiah 29. 13 against the Pharisees?,” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 16 (2006) 79-94 at 89–91 gives reason to think that in several respects it is closer to *Mark* 7 than are either the Septuagint Greek or the Massoretic Hebrew.

⁷ *A Marginal Jew* IV 375 at n. 92.

precepts of men to be given external compliance. Amid all the differences emphasized by *A Marginal Jew*,⁸ the Hebrew uses the same key idea as the Greek, “precept(s) of men,”⁹ the phrase that Jesus, having quoted it, equiparates with “human traditions,” and contrasts both (i) with what is from the heart (as opposed to what is hypocritical) and (ii) with the superior, divine law of the written Torah. Whether he used the Masoretic Hebrew text, some other Hebrew text, an Aramaic targum approximating to the Masoretic more than the Septuagint or to the Septuagint more than the Masoretic, or used the Septuagint with or without tweaking, Jesus made his point not by repeating the precise scriptural phrasing (“precepts of men”) but by developing and launching off it – so as to contrast two phrases not literally in any now extant version of *Isaiah*: “tradition of men” contrasted with “precept/commandment of God”. To condemn the Pharisees as teachers, his argumentation after quoting *Isaiah* neither needs nor uses the Septuagint’s talk of teaching and doctrine.

2. The main argument for inauthenticity focuses on the idea that Jesus is presented here in *Mark 7* (especially vv. 15 and 19) as abrogating (abolishing) the laws, written (Mosaic) as well as unwritten, against eating *kinds of food* defined by those laws as impure/unclean. But (so the argument goes) it is impossible that Jesus did or purported to do so, since if he had, that fact would have been evident elsewhere in the Gospels and in the debates among Christians in the two decades after Easter; but there is no evidence that in those debates any appeal was made to this passage or episode, or to any other saying of Jesus. So this is not a saying of Jesus.

This argument fails because early Christians could see as well as we can when we read it as a whole, instead of as artificially disconnected fragments,¹⁰ that this whole controversy with these Pharisees had nothing to do with foods defined as unclean, but (as *Matthew’s* version of the passage emphasises) was concerned only

⁸ 372-3, 375.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 370, 372 (“a commandment of men”).

¹⁰ Cf C.S. Lewis, “Fern-seeds and Elephants” (1959) in Walter Hooper ed., *Fern-seed and Elephants and other essays on Christianity* (London: Fount, [1975] 1977), 89:

These men [N.T. scholars in the mould of Bultmann and his successors] ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.

with traditions or precepts about ritual purifying, in this case, of *hands*.¹¹ *Mark's* subsequent editorial comment that Jesus thus “made all foods clean”¹² is some evidence that some appeal to this incident may well have been part of the Christian debates in the 40s – debates of which we know only a fraction. But certainly the comment reflects (and may well do no more than reflect) the upshot of those debates, which was indeed the abrogation of all those food laws, a couple of decades after Easter.

A Marginal Jew's main argument for the inauthenticity of *Mark* 7. 1–23 concerns v. 15:

There is nothing from outside a man
that by going into him can defile him!

The argument that this, like its parallel in v. 18a and the parenthetical comment by the evangelist in v. 19b (“This he said, making all foods clean”), is reporting (purportedly) the abrogation by Jesus of the entire structure of food laws in both the written Torah (*Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*) and the oral Torah of rabbinic tradition. And this report (so the argument runs) cannot be authentic, because (a) it makes no appearance in the disputes among leading Christians in the 20 years after Easter about adherence to Jewish food laws; (b) it is greeted with silent incuriosity by those to whom it is addressed (first the crowd, then the disciples inside the house); and (c) it leaves no trace in Jesus’

¹¹ Modern Talmud scholars see this clearly, too: see Yair Furstenberg, “Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15,” *New Test. Stud.* 54 (2008) 176-200 at 186:

In light of these *halakhic* facts, a coherent reading of the narrative in Mark 7 becomes possible. In response to the Pharisaic insistence upon washing hands before eating, Jesus replies, ‘there is nothing outside a person which by going into him can defile him’. There is, in other words, no need to wash one’s hands before eating. Jesus’ opinion – contrary to that of the Pharisees – is that even food which has been contaminated by defiled hands does not contaminate a person who ingests it. But there is much more to this dispute than a *halakhic* disagreement regarding the possibility of contamination through ingestion. In the second limb of the logion, Jesus challenges the very purpose of the Pharisaic approach to ritual purity. In his view, the concern with defilement penetrating the body contradicts an alternative understanding of ritual defilement: one concerned with ‘that which enters the body’, and another, concerned with ‘that which comes out of it’.

¹² This comment does not exist in the *Textus Receptus* or Majority Text, but in the text traditions preferred in and since Hort and Westcott as the Critical Text. The difference in *Mk* 7. 19 is simply between the (Hort-Westcott) masculine participle *katharizōn* (dependent on “he said”) and the (*textus receptus*) neuter *katharizon* (dependent on “everything that enters from outside... goes out ...”). For the sake of the argument I accept the Critical Text, but since a comment such as that yielded by that Text is unlikely to be as early as the rest of the passage, there remain historical issues going beyond textual criticism alone. (The important parallel use of *ekatharisen* by Peter in *Acts* 10. 15 and 11. 9 – God has made all foods clean -- is compatible with either view.) For well informed thoughts favoring *katharizon*, see Jean Delorme, *L’heureuse annonce selon Marc: Lecture intégrale du 2^e évangile* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), vol. 1, 486. For *katharizōn*, see Lagrange, *Marc* ad loc.

conduct as we can discern it from this and the other gospels.¹³ And from the inauthenticity of vv. 15 and 18a follows the inauthenticity of the rest of vv. 1–23. And that is why (the argument continues) the whole passage is absent from *Luke*: as Luke knew, *Mark's* claim that Jesus during his public ministry declared all things clean is fatally inconsistent with the reality that Christians were uncertain, indeed in dispute among themselves, in the first post-Easter decades, about whether the food laws of the Old Covenant (*Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*) applied under the New Covenant; Luke reports that uncertainty and those disputes here and there in *Acts of the Apostles* 10 through 15. As *A Marginal View* puts this version of its key argument against the authenticity of Mk 7. 15 (nothing from outside can defile):

To have presented Jesus affirming Mark 7:15 during the public ministry would have made the stories in Acts 10–15 unintelligible... Implicitly, then, Luke indicates by his omission that Mark 7:15 cannot be a saying of the earthly Jesus if anything like the events recorded in Acts 10–15 ever occurred in the early church. (*Marginal Jew* IV 462)

In short: if Jesus had ever said anything like Mk 7. 15, it would have been used in the debates of the 30's and 40's about whether the Jewish food laws remained in force; but we hear nothing of any such use; so there was no such use; so he was never heard to utter the proposition in Mk 7. 15; so Mk 7. 15 is inauthentic.

The unsoundness of this whole argument is as immediately apparent to outsiders like me as I later discovered it is to insiders like James Crossley, whose book focussing on these verses¹⁴ came out in 2004, was reviewed mainstream and respectfully in 2005, but does not figure in *A Marginal Jew's* 300-work bibliography for these verses up to 2007. The objection of the Pharisees and scribes, like the counter-argumentation and subsequent proclamation and explanation of Jesus, across vv. 1-23, is all about the oral traditions and precepts of the elders, not about written Torah, the commandments of God set out in *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*. Moreover, the objection put to Jesus, like his response, is about washing hands before eating. Neither the objection nor the response concern foods declared impure, let alone foods declared impure by the written Torah. So Jesus' statements in this passage could

¹³ Cf. *A Marginal Jew* IV 385:

...after all that we have seen so far in the four volumes of *A Marginal Jew*, it hardly seems credible that the popular Palestinian Jewish teacher named Jesus should have rejected or annulled in a single logion all the laws on prohibited foods enshrined in *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy*.

¹⁴ James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (London & New York: T & T Clark International, 2004) (JSNTS 266), 183-205. Especially 191-2. Given the main point, it was not necessary for Crossley to read the actual editorial comment in 7. 19 as restricted to foods permitted by the Torah (pp. 192, 200). The comment could be a theological accommodation of the whole incident to the Church's decisions in the late 40's, and inserted by Mark after his initial preparation of the gospel. But Crossley's reading enables him to date *Mark* before all the Christian controversies of the 40s about the food laws.

never have provided a sustainable primary consideration in the Christian debates of the 30's and 40's against the continuance of the written Torah's food laws. And that suffices to sink the argument in this chapter of *A Marginal Jew*.¹⁵ Nor can any plank of rescue for the argument be found in the fact that – *either* once those debates about the food laws had been resolved for Christians c. AD 49 by the apostolic decision to treat those laws as generally abrogated, *or* perhaps preparatory to that resolution – the author or redactor of *Mark* could and did add a theological comment in v. 19b: extrapolating from what Jesus said and meant in its original context, he gives (perhaps proleptically) the Church's doctrine as developed c. AD 49 the analogical support it can get from that remark: "he thus made all foods clean". Indeed, this comment is itself some evidence that the debates of the 30s and 40s – about which our evidence is very incomplete – were not quite as silent as *A Marginal Jew's* argument from silence postulates they were, about the relevance of this hand-washing controversy and outer-inner purity.

3. A subsidiary version of the inauthenticity argument enlists *Luke* as a supporter: *Luke* omits the whole episode because Luke's author can see that it could not have happened, because he like the author of *A Marginal Jew* was aware of the Christian debates about food laws,¹⁶ debates from which this episode is so strikingly absent.

But this appeal to *Luke* fails, too – for many reasons, of which the simplest is that *Luke* itself includes a saying of Jesus that includes exactly the same logical content as the allegedly impossible declaration in Mk 7. 19 that *all foods are clean*: the Lukan saying (*Lk* 15. 11) is : "for you *all things are clean*."

Though *Luke* (on the assumptions of *A Marginal Jew*) relied on *Mark* for about a quarter of his own Gospel, *Luke* too (so this supplementary argument-from-silence in *A Marginal Jew* goes) couldn't swallow *Mark's* fable that Jesus said "nothing from the outside is unclean;" still less could *Luke* swallow *Mark's* comment in v. 19b that by those words Jesus made all foods clean; *Luke* knew that this was all inconsistent with the absence of such sayings of the Lord in the disputes of the 30s and 40s that he himself recorded in *Acts*.

¹⁵ Crossley (an unbeliever) cements the refutation by showing that in context the evangelist's comment need mean no more than: Jesus was "declaring all foods *that Torah permits* to be pure, *and therefore not requiring handwashing*" (Crossley 102). Jesus complied with the written Torah's food laws, and neither ever put them in question nor ever gave a teaching ratifying them. For a modern rabbinic scholar's similar result, see n. 11 above.

¹⁶ See *Law & Love* 462 n. 157; cf. 396.

But: as *A Marginal Jew* itself says elsewhere,¹⁷ in *Luke* 11. 41 Luke (or his special source “L”) *made up* (adding to his other source, “Q”) and ascribed to Jesus (in a later dispute about vessels used for cooking and eating food) the words “Behold, all things are clean unto you” – words that are the precise logical equivalent of *Mk* 7. 15 and 18b and 19b. It is entirely clear both in *Mark* and in *Luke* that the verbal universality (*Mark*’s “*nothing* from outside defiles... all foods [are] clean”; *Luke*’s “*all things clean*”) – universality that *A Marginal Jew* takes to abrogate the written Torah – actually is, in its context, a limited pronouncement about washing of cups, plates, or washing of hands, and also about the questionable status of the additions made to the written Torah by the oral traditions of the Pharisees, the Separatists for whom Jesus so often had harsher epithets.

More to the point than the unsuccessful enlistment of *Luke* as a critic of *Mark*’s authenticity here, consider *Matthew*’s stance. On the assumptions of *A Marginal Jew*, *Matthew*’s version of the whole episode is written a decade or more after *Mark*, is totally reliant on *Mark* for its information or pseudo-information, and is about 40 years after the resolution of Christian debates about unclean foods. (The improbability of these widely-held theses is discussed a bit in sec. IX and X below.) But *Matthew*, while having Jesus declare just as firmly as *Mark* that “It is not what goes into one’s mouth that defiles” (15. 11), rejects any attempt to absolutize and de-contextualize this into a rejection of the Torah’s (or indeed the tradition’s) food laws, and has as Jesus’ last word on the whole matter : “to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

And in *Mark* the case for reading restrictively the rhetorical, absolutist-sounding¹⁸ v. 15, “nothing from outside can defile,” is greatly strengthened by its place as mere preface to the vital proposition towards which Jesus is heading all along, which will constitute the added value in his explanation given indoors, and for which his primary “text” was that quotation from *Isaiah* about the heart overlaid with human precepts. The quotation underpinning his whole response to the Pharisees began, [v. 6] “This people honor me with their lips but their *heart* is far from me.” From there Jesus can easily reach [v.19] “whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him *for it goes not into his heart* (but his stomach...);” and [v. 21] “For from within, *out of the heart of man*, go evil thoughts (*dialogismoi*)...” – evil

¹⁷ *Law & Love*, 409.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. *Hosea* 6. 6: “I desire mercy *and not sacrifices*” (discussed, as “fiery rhetoric,” with other instances, in *Law and Love* 386).

deliberations shaping the proposals that when chosen become the meaning and intent of wrongful conduct. I will return to this vital proposition, which wins few lines in the 130-page discussion of *Mk 7* in *A Marginal Jew*, but is the root and core of Christian moral thought and marks it off firmly from the rabbinic tradition down even to today.

III

A Marginal Jew's author was a leading figure among the Catholic scripture scholars at the conference of Catholic and non-Catholic scholars in Rome late in October 2013, on *The Gospels: History and Christology*, organized by the Joseph Ratzinger Benedict XVI Foundation. His paper

“The Historical Figure of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and His Historical Parables” (you can read it in volume I of the nicely bound Libreria Editrice Vaticana book of the conference)

had one main message: most of the parables in the Gospels are inauthentic, not least the Good Samaritan, the parable on which Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict had lavished most attention in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* vol. 1 (2007). It is unmasked as one of the many parables that “actually come neither from the historical Jesus nor from the disciples in the earliest decades of the first century;” they should be judged to be, not “authentic,” but rather “pure creations of the evangelists writing toward the end of the first century.”¹⁹ But that’s all right, the author assured the conference; modern Christians still “hear the parables as the inspired Word of God guiding them today” and “[w]hether that inspired word was first spoken by Jesus of Nazareth in AD 30 or by Luke the evangelist in AD 90 is of no great concern to believers engaged in public worship or private prayer.”²⁰

And the paper’s author added that a doctoral student of his, working on poverty in Luke-Acts, finds that “a proper grasp of Luke’s theology and spirituality” is “greatly” assisted by the “decision” that the Good Samaritan is “redactional,”²¹ that is, a work of Luke’s imagination with

¹⁹ Bernardo Estrada et al. (eds.), *The Gospels History and Christology: The Search of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 252-3.

²⁰ 250-251.

²¹ 259.

no other “prior material or stimulus” except “an Old Testament narrative, specifically 2 Chronicles 28. 5 – 15,”²² an episode in the wars between Judah/Judea (fallen into idolatry) and the Israelites of Samaria in which the victorious Samaritans sent back to Jericho the 200,000 captured dependants of the defeated Judeans, clothed by the Israelites of Samaria, shod, fed and anointed at the urging of a prophet of the Lord.

An author who misunderstands his own lay contemporaries can hardly be a sound historical-critical guide to the past. It is certainly very mistaken to think that “believers engaged in public worship and private prayer” have “no great concern” whether it is true or false that one day “a lawyer stood up to put [Jesus] to the test” and then, “desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus ‘And who is my neighbour?’” – have no great concern whether Jesus did or did not in fact reply “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,” and so on all the way through to “Go and do likewise.”

But in the real world, if there is one reason more potent than others in the remorseless dwindling away of the numbers of “believers engaged in public worship or private prayer” in the Western world, it will be their ever-growing suspicion that some, indeed much, perhaps most or virtually all of what the Gospels tell us are words and deeds of Jesus are really not words and deeds of Jesus, but were made up after he had been dead and buried for 40, 50, 60 or 70 years.

Sensible people don’t want to be dupes. They find no comfort in the doctrine that what they are listening to is “the inspired word of God,” because they know well enough that the doctrine that God inspired the Scriptures was hammered out, taught and believed by Christians who staked their lives on the belief that the Gospels’ accounts are authentic, and Jesus did respond to the lawyer with the parable.

The many departing Christians (80-95% of the Catholics in Quebec or Belgium over the past 50 years) mostly haven’t heard of *Dei Verbum*, but what they are thinking -- as they walk away from worship, prayer and faith that is feeling without truth -- you could put in terms of *Dei Verbum*. There Vatican II affirms that the New Testament like the Old is the inspired word of God, and affirms too that this means that what the sacred authors assert (but only what they *assert*) is asserted also by the Holy Spirit and therefore is certainly true. But, more to the point, in a

²² 257-259.

part of the same Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, that has nothing to do with inspiration and inerrancy, but that does again restate what every believing Catholic believed from the first centuries down to 1964, we find these propositions: that the Gospels have as their authors only apostles and associates of the apostles, and are historical; and that in teaching about Jesus' words and deeds the Gospel authors "always" state true and sincere things *because* those same authors' "intention in writing was that, either *from their own memory and recollections, or from the testimony of 'those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word'*, we might know 'the truth' about the things about which we have been taught' (*Lk* 1. 2-4)".

In *A Marginal Jew*, that proposition of the Council, a proposition which – for a critical historian and an ordinary believer or ex-believer all alike – is the very foundation of *Dei Verbum* and of the Catholic faith, is treated as a nullity, as essentially mistaken and irrelevant. So the volumes' author's repeated words of comfort about the inspired word of God are in vain. As for his reassurances that conclusions like his about the parables and teachings and works of Jesus leave the faithful undisturbed, these too are defective history.

IV

Why was there a Ratzinger Foundation conference on the Gospels in 2013 ? In 2011 there appeared the last instalment of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's three-volume *Jesus of Nazareth*. The first volume was (as I said) in 2007. In 2008 its author as Pope Benedict convoked and presided over a Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Mission and Life of the Church. A couple of weeks into the Synod, on 14 October 2008 – 46 years and 4 days after, as young Professor Fr Ratzinger, he stood in front of the German Bishops assembled in Rome on the night before the opening of Vatican II, to address them on the subject of the Gospels – Pope Benedict addressed the assembled bishops from around the world, on the same subject, a subject-matter scarcely addressed by any Pope speaking to assembled bishops during the 40 years since the Council closed. In a short address, surely written by himself, he expressed his dismay that in Germany the exegetical mainstream (he

used the English word) “denies that the Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist and says that Jesus' corpse remained in the tomb. The Resurrection in this view would not have been a historical event but a mere theological view.”

In this section of my paper I show how Pope Benedict – in whose presence I have been for more than a month of working days over the years, and whose intellect, learning and holiness I can only envy – in this address, despite the clarity and undeniable correctness and relevance of everything he there said, nonetheless identified *neither* the deepest and I think most important problem with, and effect of, these mainstream denials, *nor* their radical opposition to Vatican II (*Dei Verbum* 18-19)²³ and to the whole belief of Christians since the beginning. The moment passed – a moment of world-historical importance. In Pope Benedict's long follow-up post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* in 2010, not a word was said about these radical, widespread, mainstream denials, or about *Dei Verbum* 18-19.

And in his personal book *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2 (later in 2010), at the decisive moment when Jesus appears to the apostles and disciples at supper on the evening of Easter Day, the author seems to concede to “most exegetes” that actually Jesus did not eat any fish (or anything else) and that “Luke is exaggerating here in his apologetic zeal” by claiming that he did. I link this disconcerting stance to the incomplete alternatives set up in the little address to the Synod: between, on the one hand, reading the Gospels with faith (consciously or unconsciously *within* theology) and, on the other hand reading them with “the conviction [of a profane philosophy] that the Divine does not appear in human history.”

The address to the Bishops said:

Working on my book on Jesus has provided ample occasion to see what good can come from modern exegesis, but also for recognizing the problems and risks. *Dei Verbum*, n. 12 offers two methodological guidelines for suitable exegetical work.

Pope Benedict then outlined these two methodological guidelines: 1. Use the historical-critical method, because salvation history is real history, not mythology. 2. Accept that a dimension of this history is divine action, and words (communications) that are both human and divine. This second dimension, he said, is neglected by those who treat the Bible solely as a history book. Still more serious (he said) is

²³ See the appended English (my translation) and Latin.

the common mistake of treating the Scriptures without a hermeneutic [an interpretative method] *of faith* such as is outlined in *Dei Verbum*

12. When that hermeneutic of faith disappears –

another type of hermeneutic will appear by *necessity*, a hermeneutic that is secularist, positivist, the key fundamental of which is the conviction that the Divine does not appear in human history. ...

He went on:

Today the exegetical "mainstream" [in his German original and Italian delivered the word is in English] in Germany, for example, denies that the Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist and says that Jesus' corpse remained in the tomb. The Resurrection in this view would not have been a historical event but a mere theological view [*rein theologische Sichtweise; una visione teologica*].

This is a moment in the Pope's address of world-historical importance. As far as these eyes can see, it may take generations of reparative work by competent scholars and clear-eyed pastoral vigilance and guidance to recover from the predicament which the Holy Father, then and there, uncharacteristically failed to successfully diagnose, to name, and to set towards rectification.

For he did no more than state two results of the mainstream's adoption of the *profane-philosophical* hermeneutic: (a) a profound fissure between scientific exegesis and *Lectio divina* (that is, a theological reading of the Scriptures); (b) a sort of perplexity of preachers in regard to the preparation of homilies; for Scripture is the soul and foundation of theology.

Now indeed those are two results or implications. But not the most important. The German (and of course American, French and English) Catholic Scripture-scholar mainstream's denials – the two denials Pope Benedict mentions and the others that accompany them – go to Christianity's very foundations. And of that he said nothing.

No surprise, then, that his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 2010) manages to avoid even alluding to, let alone confronting, the revolt of Catholic exegetes against *Dei Verbum* and against the entire tradition and teaching of the Catholic and apostolic Church about the Christian faith's credentials and foundation. *Verbum Domini* cited eighteen of *Dei Verbum*'s sections, but about the ones that matter, above all sections 18 and 19, it has not a word, not even a citation footnote. The Apostolic Exhortation made no reaffirmation, however muffled, that the Church believes the Gospels to state honest truth about what Jesus *really* said and did because what they transmit are accounts directly or indirectly by apostles using their memory of what he said and did. A historic opportunity was missed, yet again, and seems unlikely to recur any time soon.

A few months later there appeared the second volume of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict's *Jesus of Nazareth*. What does it say in face of the "mainstream" German opinion about the Resurrection? It says many good things,²⁴ about the Resurrection as not only revival of a corpse like Lazarus, but also and much more the manifesting of a new way of existing, a new dimension of reality; and about the utter impossibility of preaching Jesus' resurrection in Jerusalem (as it was preached) if the grave were not empty (which it therefore was). But having thus rejected the mainstream's wholesale skepticism, the book suddenly gives skepticism a retail licence:

Luke underlines quite dramatically how different the risen Lord is from a mere "spirit" by recounting that Jesus asked the still fearful disciples for something to eat and then ate a piece of grilled fish before their eyes.

Most exegetes take the view that Luke is exaggerating here in his apologetic zeal, that a statement of this kind seems to draw Jesus back into the empirical physicality that had been transcended by the Resurrection. Thus Luke ends up contradicting his own narrative, in which Jesus appears suddenly in the midst of the disciples in a physicality that is no longer subject to the laws of space and time.²⁵

So: does Joseph Ratzinger agree with "most exegetes"? He leaves us to believe so, because there follow some pages of inconclusive discussion of other texts about "table fellowship", and then just: "What this table fellowship with the disciples actually looked like is beyond our powers of imagination" (p. 272). Thus the opinion of "most exegetes" holds the field, as it did in the appointments to the Pontifical Biblical Commission and in that Commission's public documents during Cardinal Ratzinger's supervision and control of it. After all, watching someone eat a piece of fish is within, not "beyond" our powers of imagination, as indeed are wounds in hands, feet and side.

Luke's "apologetic zeal" was the explanation offered by the one who concurs with "most exegetes" in treating his account as self-contradictory and invented. And that should remind us of what is wrong not only in reassurances by the author of *A Marginal Jew* to the Ratzinger Conference, but also in Pope Benedict's contrast between a hermeneutic of faith and a philosophical or profane-philosophical hermeneutic, in his 2008 address to the Synod and then in the same terms in post-Synod Exhortation.

²⁴ Mistakenly, I think, it twice has Peter and the other six disciples on or at the beach with an unrecognized Jesus before setting out again (rather than, as *John* strongly suggests they were, at a distance from the shore when Jesus shouts to them "Try again but on the right-hand side!")

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two, Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection* (Ignatius Press, 2011), 269. Cf p. 265: "in Luke's account he even asks for a piece of fish to eat, in order to prove his real bodily presence."

V

Between those alternatives – on the one hand faith (and theology) and on the other hand profane philosophy closed to any idea of divine action in the world (including effective divine-human communication about reality, both visible and invisible) – there is philosophy (and common sense – reason) that is *open* to the idea (the hypothesis) that there is or can be special divine action in the world. Those who judge this third position sound will, if they are consistently reasonable, be willing to judge that there has been such action, *provided* that hypothesis can be made good in evidence-based propositions sufficiently trustworthy to warrant belief – to warrant, that is to say, a judgment that those propositions about divinely authored or co-authored particular words and dateable deeds are true. Such a judgment, such a belief, can and often does broaden and deepen reasonably (though also doubtless with the help of the divine action of grace) into the more comprehensive trusting (and commitment) we call faith.

If Christianity did not have *information* at its centre, it would be no vessel in which to launch out into the deep. If Catholicism ceases to treat itself as bearing the treasure of *truth about this life and the next*, its rapid, unprecedented unravelling and, on every measure, decline and fall²⁶ in Europe and America since 1965 will continue until it is a socially insignificant remnant in obscure places.

And there is a well-known and appropriate *name* for studies that consider the origins and content of the four Gospels so as to respond to questions – from open-minded philosophers, historians and people of common-sense (anyone) – about whether these documents convey the teachings and actions of Jesus, teachings and actions that in turn may well convey, as they claim to, information about new realities. The name is “historical-critical” studies, done on a basis that is philosophically sound (and therefore capable of being more adequate critically), without the profane presupposition, not in the last analysis philosophically

²⁶ Russell Shaw, *American Church: The Remarkable Rise, Meteoric Fall, and Uncertain Future of Catholicism in America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013); David Carlin, *The Decline & Fall of the Catholic Church in America* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2003).

defensible, that there are no or no historically ascertainable divine miracles to signify divine purposes of transforming human nature to transcend death.

And there is also a *place* where the Church has spoken directly to all, in a way that is not exclusively or primarily an expression of faith, nor at all an expression of profane philosophy, but a matter of clarified, philosophically sound natural reason informed by true history; the place is *Dei Verbum* 18 and 19. Both sections begin “Holy Mother Church has always held and continues to hold...” – the word “hold” was very deliberately chosen in preference to the word “believe” precisely because (said the drafting committee in explaining its preference for “held/hold” to the assembled bishops) these sections about the truth of the Gospels affirm that “the historicity of the Gospels is not just a matter of faith but also of reason.”²⁷

In those studies as they have been practised for the past century, the trouble with the mainstream that so many Catholic scholars joined immediately after and contrary to *Dei Verbum* is twofold-- as the master professional non-Catholic New Testament scholar and historian Martin Hengel never tired of saying: (i) the mainstream are not interested sufficiently in *history*, in what happened as distinct from documents on the desk; and (ii) their approach to those documents is hyper-critical to a radically uncritical degree.²⁸

One massive historical fact is that within 35 years of Easter, the Christian faith had spread so widely and deeply that Emperor Nero could assemble from within the City of Rome “an immense multitude” of Christians to subject to “exquisite tortures” and spectacular forms of execution, night after night – a multitude even after the defection of those who turned informer to save themselves in this world. There is little chance that these martyrs went to their death on the basis of the pitifully meagre slogans that are all that most mainstream scholars are willing to admit as the first generation’s “oral traditions” and the content of the Apostolic preaching. That was preaching and witnessing done in synagogues, other

27 Hellin, 132: “Commissio scripsit ‘*tenuit ac tenet*’, quia sic melius exprimitur hanc historicitatem teneri fide *et ratione*, et non tantum fide” (italics in original). [“The drafting commission wrote ‘has held and holds’ so as to express better that the historicity being affirmed in the text is held by faith *and by reason*, and not only by faith.”]

²⁸ See e.g. Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 15, 20, 341, 489, etc.

meeting-rooms and public places in countless villages, towns and cities, and there is little chance that it could be carried on for even a week without offering or appealing to some detailed testimony about what Jesus did in the year or years before his grotesquely humiliating and shameful execution as a rebel, and some detailed testimony about what made his close disciples think he had risen from among the dead, uncorrupted by a day and two nights in a now empty tomb. The “apologetic zeal” that allegedly led Luke to concoct a fish story (allegedly in 80 or 90 AD) was a zeal at least as strong 50 or 60 years earlier, in the weeks and months after Pentecost. Many in the crowds, and many individual inquirers, in Jerusalem, in the Samaritan city and villages, in the Roman bases Caesarea Maritima and Damascus, in great Syrian Antioch and lesser Pisidian Antioch, in Athens, Corinth and Rome itself, must have been just as sceptical and in need of convincing as anyone 50 or 60 or 1950 years later.²⁹

So it is most unlikely that the resurrection – the overwhelmingly most frequent topic of apostolic and diaconal missionary exposition – was reported and expounded with just the few sentences about women at the tomb in the surviving pages of *Mark* eked out with *Matthew’s* lines about women briefly meeting and worshipping Jesus on Easter morning and then his even fewer lines about disciples,

²⁹ Ibid., 17-18:

if Paul [in his letters] communicated so many details about the earliest [Christian] community and his own break with the past to his churches, he must all the more have given them abundant information about the story and traditions of Jesus. For his hearers were at least as interested in that as in stories about figures in the earliest community or about his own fate, indeed even more so. After all, the foundation of their salvation was not Paul or Peter but the Messiah and Kyrios Jesus, his life and death as the Son of God incarnate, and his resurrection. That also applies to the words of Jesus, but above all to the details of his passion. The basic Pauline kerygmatic formulae ‘Christ died for us’ and ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’ were quite incomprehensible to the communities without an original narrative of the real events. Therefore the Jesus tradition was needed from the start. The scholar at the desk poring over fragmentary texts all too easily forgets the elementary importance of human curiosity, above all over the basic questions of our existence, when these are bound up with a living person. Nowhere does Paul say that such questions were forbidden. Such a prohibition was first announced by radical representatives of the Bultmann school like W. Schmithals... Contrary to the popular fashion [among scholars] today, Paul *could not* have spoken in a completely vague and abstract way about the crucified Christ. The hearer *must* have been able to envisage this unspeakably offensive fact in a very concrete way. Now this already applied to Paul’s preaching of the ‘crucified Messiah’ in Damascus [in synagogues there during the first days and weeks after his conversion on the road to that city, in at latest three years after that crucifixion and wretched death in shame and torments as one ‘accursed’ for blasphemy and sedition had been observed by very many people gathered in Jerusalem for the festival]... [preaching] always also in narrative form.... (emphases in the original)

some doubting, meeting him on some mountain in Galilee sometime. Historically speaking, it is most unlikely that the resurrection could be preached, and heard and believed to the point of public martyrdom of preachers and hearers alike, without the indispensable aid of testimony such as now *Luke* transmits and *John* directly gives about Jesus' two meals in the locked room in Jerusalem on Easter Day and eight days later. The apologetic zeal is either the will to deceive, or it the will to convey the truth about the zeal and apologetical purpose of Jesus, whose manifesting of "a new dimension of reality," as Pope Benedict's book rightly but incompletely calls it, might in theory have been accomplished without manifestation of himself to human witnesses, but who in fact (so the evidence goes) chose to let himself be seen and touched, and who ate in the presence of his disciples (as *Acts* 10. 41 reports Peter recounting, too) precisely so as to allay their doubts and give them good *reason* for missionary zeal in carrying their testimony as widely as they could and did.

VI

This testimony is standardly called oral tradition, and so it is. But the word "tradition" makes it easy to forget how it differed from writings. It was delivered face to face, eye to eye, with nowhere to hide either from the raised eyebrow or the request for concrete detail and personal warrant for the concreteness and trustworthiness of that detail, that *personal* testimony. It is entirely possible and historically likely that Luke's accounts of the journey to Emmaus and of the supper (with fish) behind locked doors are accounts shaped up for the Apostles and thus in due course for Luke by the unnamed one of the pair of disciples walking to Emmaus on Easter afternoon,

This man has traditionally with some plausibility been equated with Simeon who became bishop of Jerusalem after the murder of James the Lesser by the High Priest in AD 62. He may well have shaped it up into a memorisable account, or pair of accounts, within a few days, and it then could immediately take its place as basic in the Jerusalem mission and in the regular memorialising of Jesus (after his departure in the Ascension) by Mary his mother and the disciples gathered around her. The more than 90 connections of *John* with *Luke* (but not

with *Mk* or *Matt*) may well derive from the large presence of Mary as a source.

It is reasonable to think that *Lk*'s account of the return of the two disciples from Emmaus and the meal in the room with the 10 and others was composed, orally, in Aramaic, by one of the two (traditionally called Simon) and adopted by the reconstituted Twelve in the first weeks after Easter. A primitive oral proto-*Luke* has probably been put together orally by AD 34, and will be expanded with materials from Mary mother of Jesus and others during Luke's explorations, inquiries, rearrangements and translations by him until he essentially completed this gospel in the mid-50s. But that matters less than the originating of its elements, in all essentials, almost contemporaneously with the events recounted. Mainstream scholars will doubtless brush aside all such hypotheses as "pure guess", mere conjecture, unproven, and so forth. But they apply these standards of assessment with manifest bias, exempting their own web of conjectures and guesswork from any such standards of proof.

Leave aside *Luke* for a few minutes, and consider the fourth gospel, *John*. Whether or not its final, written version was not published until the late 90's, and whether or not that final version is by John the Presbyter or, if they are different, the apostle John son of Zebedee, everything in it from the point where it begins speaking of John Baptist in 1. 19 to the appended commentary a few verses from the end could have been composed within a few weeks or months of Pentecost, for preaching and teaching and memorization.³⁰

What was the apostle John doing during those first months and years? There is no reason to doubt what *Acts of the Apostles* says: he testified with Peter in Jerusalem, both in public and before the Council. *Acts* 4. 19 subtly makes clear that they preached in tandem, as a complementary pair, speaking in turn.

Acts 4 shows Peter and John uniquely prominent in the apostles' preaching and witnessing in the first months or years after the Resurrection (and being given 39 lashes each for doing so: *Acts* 5. 40). In a rarely noticed

³⁰ Attempts by mainstream scholars to show that they could not (or are most unlikely to) have been written anything like so early fall short of showing otherwise: see, e.g., Pierre Grelot, review-article on J.A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (1985), in *Revue Biblique* [1987] 519-73.

way it shows them giving testimony in tandem, by complementarity of speeches.

In *Acts* 4, they are haled before the Sanhedrin, the council of leaders and elders, who “when they saw the boldness of Peter and John... were amazed and recognised them as companions of Jesus..... So they ordered them not to ... teach at all in the name of Jesus. But –

19. **Peter and John,** answering,
 said to them:
 “Whether it is right in God's sight
 to hear **you** **rather than God,**
 you must judge.

20 For we cannot do other than tell
what we have seen **and heard.”**

On the face of it, these two verses tell what “they said”. But on inspection, the first sentence closely matches the way *Peter* speaks to the Council in *Acts* 5. 29: “We must obey **God rather than men**” – and of course echoes also the unforgettable rebuke to Peter at Caesarea Philippi, reported by *Matthew* and *Mark*: “Get thee behind me... you are not on the side of God, but of men!”³¹ And the second sentence of what “they said” closely matches *John’s* way of speaking: in the letter *1 John* 1. 3: “We declare to you **what we have seen and heard** so that you also may have fellowship with us”; and the gospel *Jn* 3. 32 says that Jesus “testifies to **what he has seen and heard...**”. Same pair of Greek verbs (differently tensed) in all three places. Thus we seem to be quietly informed by *Acts* (or by the oral or written records of the Jerusalem community that Luke is transmitting in this part of *Acts*) that Peter and John taught as a pair, dividing up their “bold” witnessing between them. What is stated by one is silently confirmed by the other, who then goes on to add to it – to *complement* it.

A year or two later they are shown still working as a pair:

Acts 8. 14: Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted **the word of God** [from the deacon Philip], they sent Peter and John to them.... 25. After Peter and John had **testified and spoken the word of the Lord** [in Samaria’s city], they returned to Jerusalem, **proclaiming the good news** [laying out the gospel] to many villages of the Samaritans.

³¹ Note however that *Jn* 12. 43 speaks of the glory of men being loved more than the glory of God.

What was the “word of the Lord” they spoke? They will have been speaking from “the word” which some months earlier they (with the others of the Twelve) had declared they wished to devote themselves to as “ministers of the word”, handing over other tasks to other disciples. That doesn’t sound like a program of unprepared reassuring discourses or spontaneous story-telling, or isolated kerygmatic theological slogans or catch phrases. The notion that these witnesses of the most awesomely transcendent events in history, sharing out responsibilities for hundreds or even thousands of new believer-followers, would permit themselves freedom to make things up, or even to only randomly recall them, is improbable. It is a notion accepted in the mainstream because these scholars, even the believers among them, methodically proceed *as if* on the unhistorical and uncritical presupposition that there had been *no* transcendent events, no unique divine actions, for the Apostles and others to witness in the flesh and testify to by words recounting a very special set of real empirical events in the flow of human history. They exclude in advance what sound philosophy accepts cannot be excluded and may indeed be integral to the best explanation of all the historical data and, therefore, part of the true history of what happened under Pontius Pilate.³²

VII

So we should *look and see* whether, in the two gospels associated with Peter and John, the gospels “according to Mark” and “according to John”, there are parts or elements that are so complementary to each other that we can – provisionally, of course : everything is subject to the principle of best explanation – treat them as

³² On the bearing of best explanation on the historical character of the resurrection of Jesus, see e.g. N.T. Wright, “Jesus’ Resurrection and Christian Origins,” *Gregorianum* 83 (2002) 615- 35 at 634-5:

... the historian may and must say that all other explanations for why Christianity arose, and why it took the shape it did, are far less convincing as historical explanations than the one the early Christians themselves offer: that Jesus really did rise from the dead on Easter morning, leaving an empty tomb behind him. The origins of Christianity, the reason why this new movement came into being and took the unexpected form it did, and particularly the strange mutations it produced within the Jewish hope for resurrection and the Jewish hope for a Messiah, are best explained by saying that something happened, two or three days after Jesus’ death, for which the accounts in the four gospels are the least inadequate expression we have.

good evidence of what Peter and John preached pairwise in, say, the city and villages of Samaria, before Pontius Pilate was dismissed and summoned to Rome in AD 36 (six years, it seems, after Easter) – preached in a form suitable for memorisation by their listeners and by deacons and other disciples on other preaching tours in the two-by-two formation demanded by Jesus of his Twelve, and again of the 70 or 72 lesser disciples he sent out..

When we look we find. We find five topical clusters, each of five units in *Mark* plus five complementary units in *John*: one cluster of 5 + 5 on John Baptist, the baptism of Jesus and the calling of Jesus' first six disciples from among the disciples of the Baptist; one cluster of 5 + 5 complementary miracles; one cluster of 5 + 5 complementary elements in the Passion and death of Jesus; one cluster of 5 + 5 complementary accounts of the Resurrection, empty tomb and appearances of Jesus; and in the middle – most relevant to us considering *Mark 7* this morning – a cluster of 5 + 5, or indeed 6 + 6, on the Bread of Life, in effect the announcement, foreshadowing and institution of the Eucharist. Five clusters; five most essential elements of the Gospel story, five bases for specifically Christian life.

The units of these clusters can be named with old St Jerome's word *pericopae* or with the metaphor deployed by Karl-Ludwig Schmidt a century ago in one of the treatises which, with those of Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, made efficacious the *Formgeschichtlicher* or "form-critical" school of Gospel studies in the three years after World War I: "pearls". Schmidt and his fellows thought that the composers of the Gospels, *Mark's* composed first of course (they all supposed), had found these pearls lying about in the swirl of oral traditions current in scattered Christian communities in the first generation or two after Jesus, and had each strung them together in a sequence that, in each Gospel but differently from the others, gives the appearance of a sort of history or biography of Jesus, a history about which each composer in fact knew little or nothing because what had come down to him was just the unordered set of pearls each recounting some isolated story, say of a controversy, or a healing miracle, or a parable (I here avoid his more opaque classification of the types or "forms" of pearls).

The objective of the *Formgeschichtlicher* school was entirely reasonable: to make a historical investigation of the period between the Easter events and the writing and publication of the four gospels (especially the first three, the "Synoptics"), an investigation of the oral tradition that, if it did not span that period by linking its end with its beginning, must have emerged like folktales during that period. Bultmann was completely correct

when he said, at the outset of the 1962 supplemented edition [==??] of his *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*:

It is essential to realize that form-criticism is fundamentally indistinguishable from all historical work in this, that it has to move in a circle. The forms of the literary tradition must be used to establish the influences operating in the life of the community, and the life of the community must be used to render the forms themselves intelligible. ... form-criticism, just because literary forms are related to the life and history of the primitive Church, not only presupposes judgments of facts alongside judgments of literary criticism, but must also lead to judgments about facts (the genuineness of a saying, the historicity of a report, and the like).³³

But of course the circle or spiral of interacting presuppositions, empirical data and tentative, mutually informing and correcting hypotheses that is the substance of all historical (or biographical or detective) work is wider and more multi-stranded than is stated in those two sentences of Bultmann. The presuppositions of Bultmann and the others included, as I have said, the presupposition that *Mark* is first and that when *Matthew* and *Luke* use *Mark* they have no independent sources of information though they have more or less distinct theological concerns. But more important, one of their presuppositions was also that miracles – wondrous divine actions – such as those alleged in the gospels (not least in *Mark*) do not occur, so that the gospel stories of them are “creations”. Rather than say, or think, that they were inventions of the apostles themselves telling false tales face to face with audiences of dupes in Jerusalem and Samaria in AD 30, 31 and 32..., they proposed that the creating occurred in scattered communities of believers in later decades, cut off from the testimony of eyewitnesses and left to imagine what happened back then, all those years ago. In a footnote on the page I have quoted from, Bultmann says:

...of the life of Jesus ‘we have reports, but none that demonstrably are assessable as original sources in the strict sense of these words’ ...and ‘there is no comprehensibly clear distinction between oral tradition and the saga; not even with full certainty and unexceptionably even if the generation following the eye and ear-witnesses is concerned’ ... [quoting from Max Kaehler, *Die sogenannte historische Jesus and der geschichtliche biblische Christus* (2nd ed., 1896), 22, 36]

But as a matter of historical-critical method it is entirely unsound to admit into hypotheses about the best explanation of all relevant data nothing except what is “in the strict sense” “demonstrable” and “fully certain” and “exceptionlessly” clear. The search for the best explanation is indeed for demonstration with reasonable certainty in judgment, but the assessing of data and hypotheses as to be rejected along the way, or in the end, must often

33 *Hist*, p. 5,

be provisional and revisable. The twin questions – (i) whether the units/pearls of the gospels were shaped by apostolic eyewitnesses themselves, and (ii) whether the arrangement of those pearls on strings or necklaces (*colliers*) or in, as I called them, clusters was itself also the work of apostles or their close associates – are questions that seem to have received no adequate attention and unbiased consideration from Bultmann, Schmidt, Dibelius and their many followers to this day. Despite a renewal, these last few decades, of mainstream interest both in the formation of oral tradition in the apostolic community, and in the internal evidence that the gospels purport, and credibly purport, to include eyewitness accounts. Mainstream studies of first-generation oral tradition remain largely programmatic, rarely venturing even tentative hypotheses identifying units and arrangements of material fit for oral teaching, catechesis, and learning.

Any reasonable hypothesis will have, of course, a degree of complexity. For suppose that Peter and John, in Samaria in say AD 32, gave a paired presentation of complementary teaching as I suggested (in say 10 units/pearls, five by Peter, five by John) on John Baptist and the calling of Jesus' apostles; and then another, again of 10 units/pearls, on the sign-miracles worked by Jesus from Cana in Galilee at the beginning to Bethany by Jerusalem at the end of his ministry; and then another likewise on his teaching and liturgical action in relation to the bread of life and its breaking in the fellowship of baptised worshippers; and then another on his passion and utterly humiliating crucifixion, and a fifth presentation on his resurrection, astounding though foretold directly by himself and remotely by the prophets of Israel. These clusters should all be detectable in the Petrine gospel *kata Markon* and in the Johannine gospel.

In its fuller iterations, *John*, being in substance the work of the learner whom the Rabbi *preferred* for conveying his higher, more advanced catechesis, will be of a style and content markedly different from the gospels derived from Peter and others such as Matthew – though there is no sufficient reason not to attribute these differences more to Jesus than to John, who had no authority to put anything on Jesus' lips.³⁴

Still, both *Mark* and *John* will each have been supplemented with further units and clusters, no doubt independently by Peter and by John in their increasingly distinct and geographically separated missions of teaching in subsequent years (Peter had to flee Jerusalem by about AD 42); and then not only supplemented but also rearranged so as to fit a new meta-cluster with the shape we recognise as “a gospel”.

There is reason to think that both *Mark* and *Matthew* (not to mention *Luke*) are each the outcome of a rearrangement of the unit-clusters (pearl-necklaces) into a sequence tailored for a liturgical year coordinated with the synagogal lectionary.

³⁴ See Marcel Jousse, *La Manducation de la Parole* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 100-102 on Jesus' selection of *appreneurs* [roughly:learners}.

Such rearrangement will have involved a certain amount of splicing, not simply stringing together five or ten or seventeen existing necklace-clusters but to some extent taking a subset of pearls from one necklace and splicing it into a different sequence. So, for example, the necklace-cluster about the Bread of Life will, both in *Mark* and in *John*, be split up so that one part or sub-cluster comes where the gospel in question is dealing with the Galilean mission and another part or sub-cluster comes where the relevant gospel is recounting the Last Supper.

The needed historical work thus involves detecting the original clusters [necklaces] by working back, so to speak, from the (text-critically authenticated) text as we have it to the original apostolically shaped oral tradition or oral teaching. This is work in line with the historical project of the “form-critics” but without their philosophical bias against miracles – even miracles appropriate to the authentication and illumination of the extraordinary message of eternal life – and without their premature (and partly apologetically motivated) bias towards late-dating, unilateral Markan priority (with Matthean and Lukan dependence), and a *John* spiritualised and treated as having perhaps impressive knowledge of Jerusalem’s geography but a substantially a-historical character making that whole gospel more or less irrelevant for evidential purposes.

A venture in detection work of the needed kind has been undertaken with great vigour and devotion over the past few decades by Pierre Perrier³⁵ and then by Frédéric Guigain,³⁶ vastly developing work done in the 1920s through the 1940s by Marcel Jousse. The venture’s work has many and various imperfections inviting brush-off by mainstream scholars. But the road-testing of it in Guigain’s translations and arrangements of the gospels and *Acts* suggests to me, after various road-tests of it myself, that this is a promising direction of travel towards secure historical-critical judgment about the formation of the four gospels, judgment that would fit a best explanation in line with the doctrine of the faith that in reading the gospels we are hearing the voices of those who from the beginning were eye-

³⁵ Introductory: Pierre Perrier, *La Transmission des Evangiles* (Sarment, 2003). Main exposition: *Les colliers évangéliques* (Sarment, 2003). Briefly: *Préface* to Frédéric Guigain, *La Torah de la Nouvelle Alliance selon la recitation orale des Apôtres* (Paris: Cariscript, 2010) xi-xxii.

³⁶ Frédéric Guigain, *La Récitation Orale de la Nouvelle Alliance selon Saint Marc* (Paris: Cariscript, 2012), and similarly for the other three Gospels

witnesses and ministers of the word (as they are called in Luke 1. 2). What is needed is road-tests by scholars with the skills of the insiders, but free from the erroneous presuppositions and attitudes that have generated historical-critical mistakes so many and so various among elite and admirably equipped insiders since 1964.

VIII

So we get back to the specific text with which I began. It is a unit in the *Mark* cluster of units (originally five, eventually 10) that can plausibly be hypothesised to have originated in tandem with a counterpart cluster now to be found in *John*. Our text, beginning with the controversy with the Pharisees and ending with Jesus' insistent teaching about what morality really is, seems to display its original location in the Bread of Life cluster by referring, in its second verse, to "the loaves" (*tous artous*, plural) and in its fifth to "the bread" (*ton arton*, singular). The first two units in the cluster were the Feeding of the Five Thousand (with loaves), given closely interlocking accounts in *John* and *Mark*, and then (following immediately in each gospel) the Lord's Walking on the Sea (a second manifestation of divine mastery over the powers of inanimate nature and of death), again given closely interlocking complementary accounts in *John* and *Mark* and ending in what is now *Mark* 6. 52 with the observation that the disciples in the boat had been utterly astounded by that miracle because they "did not understand about the loaves [*tois artois*]" (because the heart [*he kardia*] of each of them had been hardened). Then in *John* we have immediately the discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum about the Bread of Life, beginning with Jesus' observation that the crowds are following him only because "you ate your fill of the loaves (*ton artōn* plural)" and proceeding to tell (6. 27-35) of the true bread (*ton arton...ton alēthinon*) that gives life to the world (by uniting us with the Lord Jesus first by belief in his word and then by sacramental uniting with his very reality, Bread of Heaven, in both ways fitting us for the Last Day and beyond it for eternal life). That great sermon, divisible easily into two, or into three by the refrain "Amen, Amen", has as its complement in *Mark* our passage (without the editorial explanations added in the process of inserting this cluster into the gospel of Mark itself), beginning (as I said) with the same pairing of references

first to loaves (plural) and then to bread (singular), and devoted to teaching all who have ears to hear that in the new and definitive revelation, action and behaviour counts because it is the carrying out, or readiness to carry out, what has been shaped and adopted in the person's heart – one's thinking (*dialogismos*) and choosing.

I will say in our tongue the final portion as it might have been uttered, in Aramaic, face to face by Peter (the apostle surely behind *Mark* and also, in a more diluted way, behind *Matthew*) to a congregation or a crowd in Samaria or indeed in Jerusalem and eventually in Caesarea, Joppa (Tel Aviv-Jaffa) and Rome. It is Peter's eye to eye testimony (say, to Samaritans or Judeans) of what his Rabbi said to a Galilean crowd and then inside to a group of disciples. Peter and those who followed him in preaching or teaching it orally need it to be truthful and sincere, to speak from heart, to heart.

But it is not informal. It is shaped up to be memorisable, which is a matter of rhythm; and gesture; of the bi-laterality of split lines, left and right, on the one hand and on the other hand; of keywords, repetitions, contrasts, analogies; of sequences of five and ten (like fingers) or of seven (three items on each side of a central item – and so forth.³⁷ All this so that the message of salvation could be not only preached but remembered – remembered not only by believers to keep in their hearts but also by new preachers: 12 recruiting six (as the rabbis did) to make 72, who, by each recruiting six, make up “more than 500” (and so on).

Mk 7.

14 He summoned the crowd “Hear me, everyone,	and to them he said: and understand!
15 Nothing from outside him	going into a man can defile!
But things <i>these</i>	going out from him, defile the man!”
17 When he left the crowd his disciples questioned him	and went indoors, about that enigma.

³⁷ So this translation follows, closely in form, less closely in precise wording, Guigain, *La Récitation orale de la Nouvelle Alliance selon saint Marc* (2012), 86.

To them he said:

“So even you –	uncomprehending –
¹⁸ Do you not grasp? by going in,	Nothing from outside, can <i>defile</i> .
¹⁹ For it goes not into the heart and thence into the privy	but the stomach, it goes out.

He said again:

What goes out <i>by this</i> is that man	<i>from</i> a man, defiled!
Yes, <i>from</i> men’s their bad intents	<i>heart</i> go forth:
sex sins, murders, acts of coveting	thefts, adulteries or malice;
deceitfulness, the jealous eye, contemptuous pride,	shamelessness, slander of God or man, unheeding folly;
these evils all and <i>by them</i> is man	<i>from within</i> go out, defiled!

According to *A Marginal Jew*: “Nowhere else in the Gospels is Jesus presented as rattling off such a catalogue of bad attitudes and habits” and it is all “highly unlikely” to derive from Jesus – it “seems to come from a different theological universe,” the universe of “Greco-Roman philosophy” and the New Testament epistles.³⁸ The “rattling off” is in the ear and on the tongue of the 21st century cleric, the catalogue (as his own excellent translation had shown) is neither of attitudes nor habits but mostly of actions – deeds – precisely as the carrying out of wrongful intentions, or the maintaining of conditional intentions, in either case intentions shaped in thought’s deliberations (*dialogismoi*). And for reasons I return to a bit in sec. XI, we should not stay burdened with the over-arching presupposition in *A Marginal Jew*: that *Mark* is not only composed after the Epistles but can be presumed not to convey words and deeds of Jesus such as might shape and inform those Epistles.

³⁸ *A Marginal Jew* IV 398-9.

In truth, this 12-item summary of an exploration of immorality, though not exhaustive (and much of taken from the Decalogue), is of exceptional profundity. It is far superior, for example, to Plato's itemisation of 10 vices in his depiction of the Last Judgment in the *Gorgias* 525a,³⁹ profound though that of course is.

And it is superior, I think, to any of the vice lists in the Epistles; those vice lists altogether include 10 of the 12 items in *Mark's* list but each in a list shaped in the heat of polemic addressing specific issues, often specific to a particular community at a particular time.⁴⁰ Looking at the list in *Mk* 7. 21-22, Fr Lagrange in his 1910 commentary on *Mark* says it is a morality more *largement humaine* (more broadly human, humane, humanist) than Plato's, because for Christ, here, virtue is summed up in purity, simplicity, freedom from pride, moderation in desires, and respect for the rights of one's neighbour. Fr Moloney, my compatriot colleague on the International Theological Commission in the late 80s, says in his 2002 commentary on *Mark* that the last three vices listed are so "seemingly small" compared with murder and fornication that maybe they just reflect "problems faced within the Markan situation"⁴¹ (somewhere in southern Syria between AD 70 and 75).⁴² But slander of God or man, pride, and folly easily match murders and fornications in their true gravity. *A Marginal Jew* suggests that folly (*aphrosynē*) is just put there by "Mark" as an *inclusio*, a balancing item to match Jesus' denunciation of his disciples' lack of understanding. Far more likely, in truth, it is Jesus' closure of his list with the deepest root, the most inward and all-embracing of all these evils; Jesus tells us what this folly is, when he tells of the rich man who stored up all his wealth in barns all ready for him to enjoy and right then God said "Fool! (*aphrōn*) this night your soul is required of you, and now what will become of all this...?" *Stultitia*, as Aquinas says,⁴³ is not low IQ, but my folly – my unwisdom -- of so immersing myself in worldly concerns as to be heedless of the spiritual matters, of eternal life itself and of the moral goods intrinsically linked to fitness for that; Aquinas (who does not seem to cite *Mark* 7. 23) thinks it is more likely than not to be linked in particular cases with *luxuria*, inclination to fleshly, especially sexual

³⁹ Roughly: perjuries, injustices, falsehood, imposture, lack of restraint, luxurious softness, insolence, lack of balance, deformity, lack of proportion.

⁴⁰ *Romans* 1. 29-31 (20 items), 13. 13 (6 items); *1 Corinthians* 5. 10-11 (6 items), 6. 9-10 (9 items); *2 Cor.* 12. 20-21 (8 items); *Galatians* 5. 19-21 (15 items); *Ephesians* 4. 31 (5 items), 5. 3-5 (5 items); *Colossians* 3. 5-8 (11 items); *1 Peter* (2. 1) (5 items), 4. 3, 15 (10 items). Note that Peter's three lists include no overlaps (repeat items), yet include five of the 12 in *Mark* 7. 21-22.

⁴¹ Francis J. Moloney SDB, *The Gospel of Mark* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 144.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 40, aa. 2, 3.

indulgence, and the structure of Jesus' list hints at that, from first to last, though like his parable of the rich fool he keeps the focus wider.

The real *inclusio*, the pair of brackets opening and closing the whole passage, is of course the concept in my title this morning: defilement. What is this, once we have left behind, as we have, all concepts of ritual impurity and of impurity caused by kinds of exterior things? I will return to that at the end. But first I want to touch on three more things.

IX

This passage goes a long way to explaining why Christian morality and moral/ethical argument differs so significantly in method, tone and judgment from rabbinic ethics, which developed in direct succession from the Pharisees with whom Jesus debated. It helps explain why and how Christian morality transforms the morality of the Old Covenant. And why Christian ethics cannot be captured by the limping contrast between virtue ethics and an ethics of principles and norms, as if virtues were not living dispositions to follow the guidance of sound reason's principles and God's commandments, not only the negative principles and commandments violated by the kinds of act and readiness to act mentioned in the first half dozen or so of Jesus' list, but also the affirmative principles and rules violated in many ways and contexts by the always circumstance-relative principles and norms implicit in the vices mentioned in the second half-dozen (and also in the first). Sound moral philosophy and theology understands human acts and dispositions as manifestations of choices and neglects, and thus as more or less behavioural expressions and carryings-out of the choices and neglects of the heart – of one's intelligence and will, loving or unloving of God and of neighbour as oneself. This episode and its capture in *Mark* is a major text in the history of ethics and a fundamental text for moral philosophers and theologians.

Germain Grisez's unrivalled three volume treatise on ethics and moral theology makes the necessary point precisely when it takes up this passage:

Morality essentially pertains to thought; evil is much more in the heart than in outward behavior (see Mt 23.25–28; see *S.t.*, 1–2, q. 74, a. 1). Jesus emphasizes that the moral distinction between clean and unclean cannot be

drawn by legalistic standards for outward behavior; rather, impurity emerges from the heart (see Mt 15.17–20; Mk 7.18–23).

3. In its definitive teaching on the sacrament of penance, the Council of Trent explicitly teaches that even completely interior sins, which violate only the last two of the Ten Commandments, can be mortal and must be confessed (see DS 1707/917). Indeed, the Council teaches that these sins “sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those sins which are committed openly” (DS 1680/899).
4. Evil’s moral significance lies not so much in the harm done in outward fact as in the privation introduced in the existential domain (see *S.t.*, 1–2, q. 73, a. 8, ad 2).¹⁰ This privation is less obvious but just as real in sins of thought as in gross, outward immorality. Morally evil choices mutilate sinners, and this mutilation at once and of itself brings disharmony into their relationships with other people and God. As soon as a man commits adultery in his heart, for instance, his relationship with his wife is damaged and so is his relationship with Jesus, in which the sacramental marital relationship participates.
5. One who tries to avoid sinful outward behavior while freely indulging in grave sins of thought inevitably takes a false, legalistic attitude toward morality. If one’s heart is not pure, the attempt to avoid impure behavior becomes a pharisaic pretense. In such a case outward conformity to moral standards can only be the result of a nonmoral motive, such as shame or fear of punishment. Moral standards will seem arbitrary, irrational impositions, while inward love of goods and the attitude of openness toward integral human fulfillment will be lacking.⁴⁴

And John Paul II often said the same.

⁴⁴ Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus* vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (1983) ch. 15 Q. E.2: <http://www.twotlj.org/G-1-15-E.html>. The passage continues:

Inaccurate teaching concerning sins of thought can lead to morbid self-consciousness, inappropriate anxiety and feelings of guilt, and an inversion of the priority from doing good to avoiding evil. But to ignore or condone sins of thought is to undermine the inwardness of Christian morality, to encourage pharisaism, and ultimately to pave the way for a total abandonment of Christian moral standards in the interest of “honesty”—that is, the reintegration of people’s covetous hearts and their outward behavior. The only remedy is timely, careful, and accurate teaching about sins of thought. In this area there is much work to be done, because in times past instruction about sins of thought often was vague and confused, and in recent years it often has been omitted or lax.

X

How do these 23 verses in *Mark* stand to the parallel 20 verses in *Matthew*? *A Marginal Jew*, whose author has written more than one book on *Matthew*, devotes relatively little space to *Matthew*, on the basis that, in relation to the large proportion of *Mark* that is paralleled in *Matthew*, *Matthew* has essentially no historical information to contribute, so that the numerous differences between the parallel passages are the result of Matthean editing (redaction) for reasons related to his theological opinions and/or to the situation of the unknown community to which he belonged.

It is a consensus-based presupposition that *Mark* came first and that *Matthew* and *Luke* used and relied upon *Mark*, each adding some material made up by himself or derived from some tradition peculiar to him, plus some material drawn from an oral or written early source known to scholars as Q and defined as a source unknown to *Mark* but relied upon by *Matthew* and *Luke* for all the passages (pericopes) in which each parallels the other but not *Mark*. The so-called Two-Source/Document or Four-Source/Document theory.

A Marginal Jew does for a few lines consider the possibility that *Mark* is relying on *Matthew* in our *pericope*, but finds little or nothing to support it, and recalls the fine work of German scholars in the 1950s detailing ways in which *Matthew* 15. 1– 20 has (they confidently think) condensed and smoothed out and enlivened *Mark* 7. 1– 23. But neither *A Marginal Jew* nor Gerhard Barth⁴⁵ noticed some obvious ways in which *Matthew*'s gospel has given us a *less* coherently developed and focussed account of this episode.⁴⁶ The structure of *Matthew*'s pericope is *relatively* jerky:

(i) the Pharisees' challenge about defying tradition about hand-washing is met with a counter-challenge about their elevating tradition over the written law of God; (ii) *Isaiah* 29 is brought in very late, as a back-up; (iii) the crowd are then summoned to hear the new point about being defiled not by what goes out not by what goes in; then (iv) *Matthew* departs entirely from *Mark* with three or four entirely new propositions: the Pharisees are reported to have been offended; but they are plants not planted by God and will be rooted up; they are blind guides leading the blind into the pit; they should be

⁴⁵ Gunther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (London: SCM Press, [1963] 1982), 87-88.

⁴⁶ As was pointed out 90 years ago by M-J Lagrange in his well-known commentary on *Matthew*, ad loc.

ignored; (v) then we revert to something like *Mark* with a request for explanation of the enigmatic saying about what goes in and what goes out; and (vi) the explanation is given, but with the evils that emanate from the heart reduced from 12 to six.

In *Mark's* account, on the other hand, *Isaiah* comes at the beginning of Jesus' response, which is thus controlled entirely, and quite smoothly and dynamically, by each of the two ideas Jesus takes from *Isaiah*: the precepts of men are of little or no authority when in conflict or tension with God's, and the heart is what counts.

The comparative expository weaknesses of that version of the apostolic preaching which was set down in *Matthew* 15. 1-20 probably have this explanation: the version's counterpart in the apostolic oral preaching and teaching was shaped by an apostle more interested in the Pharisees and the Lord's dramatic confrontation with them than in the Lord's masterly opportunism in creating out of that challenge a teaching moment of permanent significance for ethics. But more important than exposition is substance, ideas, and the ideas important in *Mark's* passage but absent in *Matthew's*. The evils that come out of a man from his heart are twice said in *Matthew* (once in v. 11 and again v. 18) to come *out of his mouth*. But murders and thefts need not involve the mouth, and evil thoughts, *dialogismoi*, as such stay inside. In *Mark*, on the other hand, evil *dialogismoi* are not an item in the list but are *that of which* the items in the list are expressions, carryings out in action and disposition; they are not merely thoughts but *intentions*, actual or conditional.⁴⁷ The hypothesis that *Matthew's* author had the passage as a page of *Mark* in front of him, or even in mind, and despite being reliant on it (as the mainstream suppose), made revision after revision that needlessly weakened it both as literary exposition made jerky and as refined coherent thought made approximate and less coherent seems to me an improbable hypothesis indeed. And the idea that *Matthew* is a revision of *Mark*, like the idea that *Mark* is a revision of *Matthew*, is even less plausibly sustainable in the unit (again touching bread and the transition to the New Dispensation) that immediately follows in both gospels, the episode with the Syro-

⁴⁷ See n. 3 above. Note that *Matthew's* miss here is just a matter of two words being in different order.

Phoenician or Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon – and in many other units as well.

None of this strongly suggests that *Matthew* (or indeed *Mark*) made anything up, or that Jesus never made a contrast between what allegedly defiles by going into the mouth and what actually defiles by coming out of the mouth (such as false witness, slander of God or man, or the other deceits and some of the shamelessness mentioned in *Mark*).

These accounts of what Jesus said, and of the immediate context in which he spoke, are selective. Jesus' explanations of his enigmatic saying about what goes in and what comes out – whether explanations all given on the same occasion or given on more than one occasion – could well focus now on a narrow contrast (into-mouth v out-of-mouth) or a more universal contrast (into-one's-mouth v out-from-oneself)

Nor should we think that if *Matthew* was not editing *Mark*, *Mark* was editing *Matthew*. No, it seems to me now – something I had not sufficiently considered two years ago – that the mainstream (both the majority who put *Mark* first and the better arguing minorities who put *Mark* last of the three Synoptic Gospels) have failed to respond adequately to the critics who in every generation down to today since the early 1800s have held

on the basis of unsurpassed acquaintance with the text of the *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* – being often themselves translators of all the gospels and/or creators of synopses requiring attention to *every* similarity and difference between these three gospels –

that none of the three depends on either of the others, but all three have as their direct source the oral preaching and teaching of the Apostles in the 30s, acting both collectively and individually to select and shape coherent, telling and memorable elements of the Lord's words and actions; preaching and teaching these selected units and clusters from memories rendered into the memorable; and thus transmitting them into the memories of deacons and other disciples and believers, and thence into the collectivity's liturgies and therefore soon into writing. Such a collectively managed oral transmission by a number of primary witnesses of the events recounted is the kind of matrix liable to generate the degree of similarity and

difference between versions of the collectively agreed units, versions generated by primary witnesses with differing memories and focuses of interest, and interested always in the *sense* (meaning) of what the Teacher said, rather than with either his *ipsissima verba* or his mere *vox* or style. By *sense* here I mean what a good student is after when he or she makes a page or two of notes of an hour-long lecture without much concern for the exact wording (*ipsissima verba*), but setting down what was indeed communicated, accurately.

B.F. Westcott formulated this theory powerfully in 1851 in Cambridge and it was dominant in Anglican and Catholic scholarship through most of the nineteenth century, weakening among non-Catholics around the beginning of the 20th century, though still ably defended in the early 20th century by Arthur Wright, Cambridge author of perhaps the most elaborate synopsis ever. The theory of dependence on orally transmitted sources (perhaps not without written notes taken during Jesus' public ministry, and by promptbook texts not amounting to gospels as we know them) was used down to the 1950s by very many Catholic scholars. Then, not long after it had been abandoned by the new-style Catholic mainstream, subscribing almost to a man to Two-Source/Document orthodoxy, the no-inter-dependence oral transmission theory was given new life among non-Catholics by Birger Gerhardsson, in his *Memory and Manuscript: Oral tradition and Written transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (1961)⁴⁸ and subsequent books in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, from

⁴⁸ Particularly interesting is the careful and appreciative review-article on it by Joseph Fitzmyer SJ in *Theological Studies* 23 (1 Sep 1962) 442-57. Fitzmyer is a figure of primary importance in the mis-reception of the teachings of Vatican II in *Dei Verbum* and in the substitution for them of a distorted interpretation of the Instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1964. In his fine pre-Council review of Gerhardsson he says, question-beggingly, that –

Even in the twentieth century some Catholic writers like P. Gaechter and A. G. da Fonseca have preferred a form of the oral-tradition theory. However, the fundamental difficulty with it was its neglect of *obvious* telltale marks of literary dependence (on written sources) which are *unmistakably* present in the first three Gospels. (p. 443, emphases added)

What is obvious to young Fr Fitzmyer but not to Westcott, A. Wright, Lattey, Dean, Fonseca, Gerhardsson, Swanson, Reisner and a good many others needs to be exemplified. Fitzmyer's appreciation of Gerhardsson did not prevent him becoming a leading defender (not just in Catholic circles) of the dependence of *Matthew* and *Luke* on *Mark*. See the careful review and critique of his work on the Synoptic Problem in Ward Powers, *The Progressive Publication of Matthew: An Explanation of the Writing of the Synoptic Gospels* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing, 2010), ch. 5. In ch. 10, Powers gives a non-question-begging critique of the literary-independence theories (he himself favours the thesis that *Mark* was last and that *Luke* access to parts of *Matthew*, which was "progressively published" (fragment by fragment) in the years preceding the near-simultaneous publication of *Matthew* and *Luke* in the early 60s). Powers' (and R.H. Stein's) arguments against the literary independence theory are far from decisive, however, when the realistic alternative is kept in mind: that each of the three could draw upon apostolically controlled and well-defined oral teaching/preaching in clusters of units such as are proposed in detail (in a revisable and often revised way) by Perrier and Guigain.

which have sprung many studies of the formation of oral tradition in controlled, semi-controlled and uncontrolled forms and contexts.

What has been lacking is serious and sustained effort to identify with particularity the probable units and clusters of the apostolic preaching and teaching, and probable ways in which such clusters came to be reshaped into the three and indeed the four gospels. Scholars seem to have been spooked by the thought, and the derisive charge, that this can only be conjecture and imagination. As if the mainstream theories of Q and of creative communities, and of the various *Sitz im Leben* or life-contexts in which each gospel and its units were generated, were not imagination and conjecture *par excellence!* Imagination, put into play by data, is entirely essential to all detective work, all biographical, all historical discernment, for it is the indispensable source of the explanatory hypotheses that must then be tested by further data and further initially hypothetical explanations until one reaches the best overall explanation. If it takes the disciplined imagination of a world-renowned pioneer of computerised fluid mechanics of airflow over wing surfaces in Dassault's design team, who as a boy memorised the gospel readings for his grandmother, to work for decades on the gospels in Greek and Aramaic to discern potential units and clusters that would be not merely possible but more or less probable in the *Sitz im Leben* of the apostolic community in Jerusalem in the first weeks, months and few years after Easter, in continuity with the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus' public ministry and the missions of the 12 and the 70 or 72 – if that's what it takes to set in motion the necessary verification (by experiments, as it were) of the hypothesis that the four gospels are each independent versions of the apostolic oral preaching, so be it.

This paper is an exercise in personal testing of the oral apostolic transmission hypothesis about the formation of the gospels without interdependence. The close examination of this passage in *Mark* and *Matthew* helps confirm me in the judgment that this is the historically critical way forward.

XI

A few general reflections on historical-critical judgment in a field which after 200 years has come up with no assured results to set against the Church's historical judgment accurately summarised in *Dei Verbum* 18 and 19. My purpose is to encourage others to set out on or press forward more boldly in the necessary work

of decades to restore Catholic gospel scholarship (and therefore seminary education) from the unacknowledged train-wreck of the last 50 years.

If an investigation of the historical Jesus assumes, as *A Marginal Jew* does,⁴⁹ that his life ended with his death on the cross, it should not be counted as a work of history done as an exercise of historical judgment accountable to public reason. It is an exercise, no doubt not fully self-consistent, in the ideology that we can call atheistic or pantheistic in the mould of Spinoza or Voltaire or Hume and their successors such as D.F. Strauss. History free from ideology is an enquiry into what actually happened – what was done and said and its effects – so far as *all that* is discoverable using all the available sources of information and evidence and all logically sound methods of reasoning. Either Jesus did, late on the Sunday after his death and burial on the Friday, speak to the ten of the Twelve who were there and to those who were with them (including the two disciples lately returned from Emmaus), all of whom were at first startled and wondering whether they were seeing a ghost, and say to them words along the lines of: “See my hands and my feet... put your hands on me... Have you anything to eat?” Or he did not. And either he then and there ate a piece of broiled fish or he did not. And if he did, a scientific, professional history using sound standards of public reason can and should include it among the events of the history of Judea and the world, and part of the earthly historical biography of that in some ways marginal Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.

Sound arguments, acceptable in public reason even though widely contested, establish that atheism and pantheism err and there is instead a transcendently intelligent and powerful creator free from all necessity to create and therefore, as intelligent and free, essentially personal and therefore capable of communicating with persons reciprocally. But if the Creator hears prayers *at all*, or intended to communicate by public historical actions and statements a purpose of enabling people to live in unending communion with God and each other, or intended to communicate *anything* to people in Judea under Pontius Pilate, or to change history then or now in *any way*, it was entirely possible and highly fitting that those

⁴⁹ *A Marginal Jew*, vol. V (2016), 2: “... finally his last days in Jerusalem culminating in his death...” (the subject of “the final stages of the overall project of reconstructing the historical Jesus....”).

communications and happenings under Pontius Pilate should be accompanied by manifestations of divine power and benevolent purpose such as any and all of the miracles stated in the gospels, capped and confirmed by the resurrecting of Jesus from the dead and his multiple interactions with people and things – breaking loaves, fire-lighting and so on – as and when he chose, during a period of 40 days, at various locations in Judea and Galilee.

The positions very predominant in Catholic New Testament scholarship since the Council – positions directly contradicting clear teaching stated by the Council to be what the Church has always taught and teaches unhesitatingly – are positions that hold or take for granted that –

- a. the oral tradition preceded *Mark* and *John* for decades;
- b. those oral traditions were more a matter of vague hearsay than of discourse heard, memorized and accurately transmitted;
- c. those oral traditions were embellished in transmission;
- d. the authors of the gospels felt free to embellish the oral traditions they received;
- e. the authors of dependent gospels (certainly *Matthew* and *Luke*) felt free to (and did substantially) embellish what they took from the source-gospel on the table in front of them with (i) oral traditions (ii) their own theological opinions (perhaps derived from their local community's needs) and (iii) their own stylistic preferences as to vocabulary, syntax and word-order;
- f. though usually not articulated expressly (as it was by Arthur Wright), it is taken to be a golden general rule of exegesis that “if a section is not found in a [gospel], the presumption is that [its author or redactor] was not acquainted with it”, since [Arthur Wright’s “loadstar”⁵⁰] “an Evangelist would omit nothing”. From a gospel’s or epistle’s silence about X one can very often infer – as most New Testament exegetes constantly do -- that X could not have been so (or could not have been known to or believed by the maker of the gospel or epistle); or to infer that not-X, or Y, must have been so (or must have been written later than..., or earlier than...); or at least that Y or not-X was probably so.
- g. miracles (especially raising or being raised from the dead) should be presumed to occur never or only very rarely and unverifiably. The foregoing principles or presumptions enable us to think that the authors or redactors of gospels that allege (lots of) miracles could and presumably did convey these false allegations without being liars or intentional weavers of fiction.

⁵⁰ Wright, *Synopsis of the Gospels in Greek* (London: Macmillan), 1896 ed. p. viii (also p. v); 1906 ed. p. xi.

- h. Or at least this must be said about miracles (including the resurrection): they cannot be affirmed by history, but can be affirmed by faith.

But no solid reasons have been given for accepting any of these positions, and there are good reasons to proceed with historical enquiry into what happened under Pontius Pilate on the basis that the best explanation of the data will include a rejection of all of them.

The late dating of the Gospels that is presupposed in several if not all of these positions is very inadequately justified. The critical survey of arguments conducted by the liberal Anglican Robinson⁵¹ in the early 70s and (albeit less ably and thoroughly) by the unbeliever James Crossley⁵² in the early 2000s confirms what is visible in most works of contemporary New Testament scholarship one happens to read with attention: the grounds offered and widely accepted in the mainstream for dating *Mark* to shortly before or shortly after the Fall of the Temple in AD 70 are embarrassingly weak, and there is no sufficient reason to date *Mark* later than the early 40s.⁵³

It is reasonable to infer, moreover, that late dates have an apologetic purpose for very many scholars in the field, motivation of a kind to be added to my 2014 list of 15 understandable but unsatisfactory motives.⁵⁴ I have in mind the scholars who

⁵¹ J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (1972); *The Priority of John* (1985).

⁵² *The Date of Mark*, 44-8.

⁵³ Likewise Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (Cambridge UP, 1998), 259-61.

⁵⁴ I said in 2014: "... a holistic reflection on all this needs to check the soundness of the argument that shows their position to be unreasonable and lacking in critical objectivity. The relevant check is the question *why* so thoroughly inadequate a position nonetheless *became the default position in Catholic (and most Protestant) bible studies*. To put the question another way: if the best explanation of guild positions and of their prevalence among Catholic biblical scholars since 1965 cannot be that they are correct, what is the best explanation of those positions and their prevalence? Pursuing that question (in either form) yields many overlapping sound answers, good explanations, evidence-based for anyone who has read into the publications and history of the Catholic branch of the guild. Here are 15 explanations, among those suitable for a public lecture; they point to good attitudes and bad, as causes of the adoption of the set of irrational guild positions: (1) desire to proclaim or adhere to faith on minimal and/or uncontroversial assumptions; (2) desire to occupy a *via media* between skepticism and fundamentalism; (3) desire for intellectual autonomy and openness to reason instead of subjection to authoritarian decrees; (4) awareness of pious frauds in the history of Christianity; (5) desire to be respected (as a genuine scholar) by competent and diligent scholars contemptuous of the Church's authority (and often even of Christianity) and academically well placed – peer pressure in the guild; "fear of men" – and this goes along with the failure to grasp that the aspiration even to use a methodology acceptable to unbelieving scholars is systematically misguided, as Dummett and Swinburne and others have pointed out; (6) desire not to be held to the labour of harmonising the Gospel testimonies – relaxation of effort and line of least resistance; (7) desire to have new things to say; (8) scepticism about divine interventions in history; (9) confusion (sometimes by muddle

privately or openly hold as a presupposition of modern people that miracles do not occur. But the four gospels are full of (accounts of) miracles. So: to think that they were written early, by Apostles or their close associates, amounts to thinking that these apostles and their associates and their gospels are well-intentioned impostors and impostures. But that is a thought scarcely tolerable to faith, even faith reduced to something constituted and validated only by inner experience. By this faulty but very understandable route one arrives at the thought: the gospels and their sources (except the almost miracle-free sayings collected in Q) are the product of Christian communities after the death or disappearance of the Apostles – or in the case of *John* are instead the work of symbolical, more or less mystical theologising in which – despite the fourth gospel’s surprising knowledge of Jerusalem and some other places – little or nothing as worldly as historical fact is actually asserted.

XII

What is defilement, now that our civilization long ago left behind the term’s original religious sense and context? A powerfully illuminating explication of it is the core of *Hebrews*. This exhortatory or imperative letter, which states much of the Catholic faith’s central content,

may well have been addressed to the Jerusalem or wider Palestinian Christians in the short interval between the murder of their bishop, James the ‘brother’ of the Lord, by the High Priest in AD 62 and their flight from Jerusalem to transJordania in AD 66 and the onset of the Judean-Galilean revolt against Rome which was to terminate in the destruction of the Temple, the cessation of its sacrifices (never to be

bona fide) of critical methods with sceptical results, and consequent *defaming as uncritical* or fundamentalist of all those who reach conservative judgments (even after rigorous critical inquiry and reflection); (10) under-informed and uncritical (under-researched) acceptance of calumnies against the competence and integrity of earlier generations of Catholic scholars (and of the Council fathers and experts); (11) indignation against excesses committed in the repression of Modernism between 1907 and say 1943 or even 1963; (12) desire to get a job or promotion in the modern academy; (13) fear of disappearing into a lifelong black hole of research on e.g. the Synoptic Problem such as might be involved in vindicating one’s departure from the mainstream (the guild position); (14) desire for simple solutions (e.g. *Markan* priority enables easy redaction-criticism of *Matthew* and *Luke*); (15) distraction by the now massive historical and present reality of Catholic institutional, intellectual and spiritual life, and of theological sub-disciplines obscuring the dependence of the whole edifice on the precise, narrow set of facts affirmed (as the fundamental) in *DV* 18 and 19 – resulting in the capacity of Catholic audiences to hear a Fr John Meier talk of “history as opposed to faith”, and (like the bishops who give his books *imprimatus*) discern no radical threat to the faith. And so on – the list can *certainly* be extended.”

restored), the disappearance of the Sadducees, and the Pharisees' reinvention of themselves (now away from Jerusalem) as rabbis of the kind eventually to be known as Talmudic.⁵⁵ Or it may have been addressed to the Judeo-Christian congregations in Rome in the uneasy period between the deaths of Peter and Paul in Rome in the mid-60s and the suicide of Nero in June 68. In any case, *Hebrews* is saturated with the thought both of Paul and of Peter, just as if it had been written – as it may well have been -- by that great, apostolic⁵⁶ figure of the earliest Church who is explicitly acknowledged in letters both of Paul and of Peter as virtual or actual co-author of one or more letters of theirs: Silas or in Latin Silvanus.⁵⁷

is constructed in a chiasmic form that can be represented as A, B, C, D : D¹, C¹, B¹, A¹. So its central teaching is located at the junction of D (8. 1 – 9. 10) and D¹ (9. 11– 9. 28) – so: at or about 9. 10-11. The argument of this pivotal passage, without saying so, takes up that explanatory critique of the Pharisees which Jesus made to his closest followers⁵⁸ indoors, away from the crowds (Mk 7. 17–23; Matt 15. 15–20).

The issue, as it is posed at this juncture in the Letter, is how to “perfect the conscience of worshippers” (Heb 9. 9), by “putting [God’s] laws in their minds, and writing [these laws] on their hearts” (Heb. 8. 10, repeated in 10. 16). To do this is precisely to “purify – cleanse or undefile (*katarieî*) – our conscience from dead works to worship the living God” (9. 14) – worship not just in forms and ceremonies but in choices to do good and rightful deeds (such as giving due hospitality and help to strangers and prisoners) and to repudiate and abstain entirely from “the fleeting pleasures of sin” (11. 25), from delightful wrong acts such as adultery and every other form of non-marital sex act (13. 2–4). The sacrifices offered by the priests of

⁵⁵ Philippe Rolland, *La succession apostolique* (1997), pp. 96-105; see also Lucien Houdry & Philippe Rolland, *La Naissance du Nouveau Testament* (2001) http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2001-05/08-6/HOUDRY2.html#_Toc510195455

⁵⁶ The Council of Jerusalem decided that its momentous letter to Antioch and the gentiles should be conveyed not by Paul and Barnabas but by Judas Barsabbas and Silas, described by *Acts* 15. 22 in one breath as “leaders among the brethren.”

⁵⁷ Robinson, *Redating* 106n: “...Silas, alias Silvanus, who was a leading Jerusalem disciple (*Acts* 15. 22) and a Roman citizen (16. 37f.)... like Mark, served both Paul (*Acts* 15. 40; *I Thess.* 1. 1; *II Thess.* 1. 1; *II Cor.* 1. 19; etc.) and Peter (*I Peter* 5. 12).” Robinson at 145 sees him setting out hastily from Rome for Pontus and the Asian churches in April 65, bearing *I Peter*, just as the Neronian programme of arrests of Christians is shifting into top gear.

⁵⁸ *Matt* 15. 15 tells us that it was made specifically at Peter’s request. *Mk* 7. 17 as usual displays Peter’s modesty.

the old, deficient, soon-to-disappear Covenant (8. 7–13) are offerings that cannot perfect our conscience, because these sacrifices “deal only with food and drink, and various immersions, regulations for the body imposed until the time [now!] of setting things right” (9. 10). What Christ accomplished as high priest of his own self-immolating and bloody sacrifice, “offer[ing] himself without blemish to God”, will indeed “purify our conscience” and “obtain eternal redemption” for us by purification – more precisely by a purification of what had been defiled (i.e. of those who had been defiled by their own words and deeds). This purification of conscience far exceeds any cleansing (*katharōteta*) of those who had been defiled (*kekoinōmenous*) that the priests of the old covenant could accomplish for them with the blood of animals (9. 13-14). This action of Christ’s is his mediation and actualization of the new Covenant “so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (9. 15), redeemed from their transgressions of the law of the old Covenant and now purified and perfected in conscience (9. 9, 14, 15) – “our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (10. 22). There is the defilement, as it is understood in the ever-new dispensation.

But we are efficaciously redeemed, and are brought to glory as brothers and sisters of Jesus (2. 10–13), ONLY IF we “hold our first confidence [in redemption and eternal life] *to the end*” and do not fall back, hardened, into the “deceitfulness of sin” (3. 13; 4. 14).

For, as a first approximation, it is reasonable to think that (as Heb 6. 4–6 very starkly puts it), “it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened [by the Gospel], and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away...”, rebelling against the purified conscience and doubtless replacing it with a newly evil one. “For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (10. 36). Those who shrink back are, or will be, lost (10. 39), for God “takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back” (10. 38).

The *defilement* which Jesus identified as the problem is therefore to be translated less metaphorically as *profanation* – rendering non-sacred, non-holy. So *Hebrews* restates the point of God’s law and discipline: God “disciplines us for our

good, in order that we may share his holiness” (12. 10). Without such holiness, such responsiveness to “the grace of God”, “no one will see the Lord” (12. 14); without it, one “become[s] defiled” (12. 15; *mianthōsin*) and may suffer the destiny of an “immoral and godless person,” like Esau, who “when he wanted to inherit the blessing, ...was rejected, for he found no chance to *repent*, even though he sought the blessing with tears” (12. 16-7). This holiness is not something other-worldly, not a mere “spirituality”, but an alignment of one’s “heart”, that is, of one’s human intelligence and will (one’s deliberations and choices) with God’s. And that is the beginning of the blessedness of the pure in heart who, Jesus said on a plateau of the Galilean mountain, will see God.⁵⁹ So *Hebrews*.

But let me finish this talk with Peter, who asked⁶⁰ Jesus for an explanation of the “what goes in/what goes out enigma (*parabolē*).” In AD 59 (so the evidence suggests) Peter wrote to Christians in Asia Minor the letter we call *1 Peter*, using as his secretary (as he says at the end, 5. 12) Silvanus (a person whom it is reasonable to think of as real author of *Hebrews*), and with a purpose, among other things, of implicitly approving both the letter of Paul to the *Romans*, to *Titus* and to *Timothy*, and the letter of *James*. In the middle (3. 13 – 16, 21) he says in words as fresh today as then, in the days before – but in the event not long before – Rome began distinguishing between followers of Christ and the legally protected religion of Judaism, and Nero began persecuting the Christians: “Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of the right (*dikaiosúne*), you are blessed... and should sanctify in your *hearts* Christ as Lord, being always ready to give an answer (a defence, a reason, *apologían*) to everyone who asks you to give *reason* (*logon*) for the hope that is in you..., having a good conscience (*suneídesin*)... [For] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, baptism now saves you, not by removing dirt from the body but by appealing to God for a good conscience.”

⁵⁹ “For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” of God and man (*Heb* 10. 26–27). “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10. 31).

⁶⁰ n. 58 above.

END

Dei Verbum Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation⁶¹

18 November 1965

- [18.2] The Church always and everywhere has held and holds that the four Gospels are of apostolic origin. For [*enim*] **what the Apostles preached** by Christ's command, **they themselves, and men associated with them** [*apostolici viri*], by inspiration of the Holy Spirit **handed down to us in writing**, as **foundation of the faith**: the fourfold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- [19] [i] Holy Mother Church [*Sancta Mater Ecclesia*] firmly and with utmost constancy has held and holds that the aforesaid four **Gospels, whose historicity the Church unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully convey** what Jesus the Son of God, while he lived among men and women, **actually/really did and taught** (down to the day of his ascension: *Acts* 1: 1-2) for their eternal salvation.
- [ii] For after the Lord's ascension, **the Apostles conveyed to their hearers those things that he had said and done**, and did this with the fuller understanding they now enjoyed having been instructed by the events of Christ's risen life and taught by the light of the Spirit of truth.
- [iii] **The sacred authors of the four Gospels wrote them** by [a] selecting some among the many things handed on either orally or in writing, by [b] synthesizing some things or [c] explicating them with an eye to the situation of the churches, and by [d] retaining the form/style of proclamation/preaching – **but always in such a way that they [the authors] communicated to us the honest truth** about Jesus.
- [iv] For [*enim*] **their intention in writing was that, either from their own memory and recollections, or from the testimony of those** "who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and ministers of the word", we might know "the truth" about the things about which we have been taught (see *Lk* 1: 2-4)."

18[. 1] Neminem fugit inter omnes, etiam Novi Testamenti Scripturas, Evangelia merito excellere, quippe quae praecipuum testimonium sint de Verbi Incarnati, Salvatoris nostri, vita atque doctrina.

[18.2] Quattuor Evangelia originem apostolicam habere Ecclesia semper et ubique tenuit ac tenet. Quae enim Apostoli ex mandato Christi praedicaverunt, postea divino afflante Spiritu, in scriptis, ipsi et apostolici viri nobis tradiderunt, fidei fundamentum, quadriforme nempe Evangelium, secundum Matthaeum, Marcum, Lucam et Ioannem.

19. [i] Sancta Mater Ecclesia firmiter et constantissime tenuit ac tenet quattuor recensita Evangelia, quorum historicitatem incunctanter affirmat, fideliter tradere quae Iesus Dei Filius, vitam inter homines degens, ad aeternam eorum salutem reapse fecit et docuit, usque in diem qua assumptus est (cf. Act 1,1-2). [ii] Apostoli quidem post ascensionem Domini, illa quae Ipse dixerat et fecerat, auditoribus ea pleniore intelligentia tradiderunt, qua ipsi, eventibus gloriosis Christi instructi et lumine Spiritus veritatis* edocti, fruebantur.** [iii] Auctores autem sacri quattuor Evangelia conscripserunt, quaedam e multis aut ore aut iam scripto traditis seligentes, quaedam in synthesim redigentes, vel statui ecclesiarum attendendo explanantes, formam denique praeconii retinentes, ita semper ut vera et sincera de Iesu nobiscum communicarent.*** [iv] Illa enim intentione scripserunt, sive ex sua propria memoria et recordatione, sive ex testimonio illorum "qui ab initio ipsi viderunt et ministri fuerunt sermonis", ut cognoscamus eorum verborum de quibus eruditi sumus, "veritatem" (cf. Lc 1,2-4).

* Cf. Io. 14, 26; 16, 13. ** Cf. Io. 2, 22; 12, 16; coll. 14, 26; 16, 12-13; 7, 39. *** Cf. Instructio Sancta Mater Ecclesia a Pontificio Consilio Studiis Bibliorum provehendis edita: AAS 56 (1964), p. 715.

⁶¹ Edited by JMF by addition of emphases (bold), and insertion of numbers and letters to indicate its structure.