

BINDING THE STRONG MAN

A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless they first bind the strong man; then indeed they may plunder the house.

—Mark 3:27

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limit it to late second-temple Judaism is not only to miss his point badly; it is to perpetuate the murderous historical legacy of misunderstanding and oppression that has too often characterized the attitude of gentile Christians (and pseudo-Christians) toward the Jewish people. This commentary aims to be clear that the opponents of Mark's Jesus were, to use apocalyptic semantics, "powers," a rubric that embraces not only members of the Roman and Jewish ruling classes then, but also those in North America now.

This brief sketch cannot be expected to convince the reader of the socio-literary method; that is up to the commentary itself. In the long run, the methods change and the text remains the same; as the old Bible school saying goes, the scripture is the anvil upon which all our tools are shaped. But in the short run, in the midst of the political struggles of each interpreter's own time, the text remains vulnerable to misreadings that mute its power to animate us to discipleship. If there are parts of my reading of Mark that seem too polemical, it is because I recognize keenly the need to "overthrow and practically refute an interpretation already in place." Bible study is only one small but, I believe, indispensable, part of the wider ideological struggle going on in the church and the world today. We must "begin to listen to symbols," for indeed in our time we have "not finished doing away with idols."

NOTE

1. Obviously each episode consists of smaller units: individual sentences, clauses, and words. Linguistic analysis and philology is the domain of traditional exegesis, and any standard exegetical commentary (e.g., V. Taylor, 1963), will suffice. I will make reference to issues of syntax and textual detail only when it is relevant to socio-literary analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

The Socio-Historical Site of Mark's Story of Jesus

Antiquity . . . the golden panhandle of history, is an ideologically important era. Aryan heroes bestrode it, founding Western Civilization. It is variously remythicized by each generation of ancient historians. The voices that speak to us from antiquity are overwhelmingly those of the cultured few; the elites. The modern voices that carry on their tale are overwhelmingly those of white, middle-class, European and North American males. These men can, and do, laud imperialistic, authoritarian slave societies. The scholarship of antiquity is often removed from the real world, hygienically free of value judgments. Of the value judgments, that is, of the voiceless masses, the 95% who knew how "the other half" lived in antiquity.

—T. F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past* (1975:xiv)

Mark's story of Jesus stands virtually alone among the literary achievements of antiquity for one reason: it is a narrative for and about the common people. The Gospel reflects the daily realities of disease, poverty, and disenfranchisement that characterized the social existence of first-century Palestine's "other 95%."

In the very first scene of the story the crowds are there, flocking to John the Baptist and his subversive promise of a new order. Throughout the narrative of Jesus' ministry the crowds are there, continually pursuing, interrupting, and prevailing upon him. Jesus' compassion is always first directed toward the importunate masses and their overwhelming needs and demands. He responds to their desperate situation of hunger and hopelessness, and nurtures their dreams of liberation. And at the end of the story the crowds are there. Manipulated by the very Jerusalem politicians who enforce their subjugation and who fear their insurrectionary potential, the crowd clamors for the execution of the one who, as far as they were concerned, failed to deliver on his promises.

In all its heroic, comic, and tragic elements, Mark's drama of Jesus portrays the world of first-century Roman Palestine "from below." It breaks the "culture of silence" (Freire) of the poor by making them—fishers and farmers, the lame and leprous—the central subjects and protagonists of the gospel of the kingdom.

2A. THE GOSPEL IN POLITICAL TIME AND SPACE: FIRST-CENTURY ROMAN PALESTINE

This chapter seeks to provide a broad, analytical portrait of the cultural, social, economic, and political structures of the world in which Mark lived and about which he wrote. This background is essential to the inductive exegetical work that makes up the bulk of this book. I have tried to keep it general, nontechnical, and limited to that which is relevant for a socio-literary reading of Mark. In my conclusions in chapter 14 I will return to this portrait, within which I will situate the ideology and social strategy of Mark's community.

i. The World of Jesus and of Mark

At the very outset we are faced with a fundamental dilemma. Mark's text represents two worlds: the one he narrates and the one in which he lives. The former is an ideological product of the latter, and the "historicist fallacy" prevents us from assuming a perfect correspondence between the two. We know, for example, that the historical "time" of Mark is not the "time" of his story about Jesus; they are separated by at least two generations. Perhaps the historical "space" is different too: where (Rome? Egypt? Asia Minor?) and under what concrete social circumstances (persecution? prosperity?) was the Gospel produced?

How can we situate the Gospel within a concrete socio-historical setting when we have no fully reliable extrinsic testimony (evidence apart from Mark's own narrative) as to either its date or geographical provenance (origin)? This ambiguity presents us with what Markan scholar W. Marxsen called the necessarily "circular character" of the analysis of historical texts (1969:25f.). On the one hand, the socio-literary approach is mainly inductive: drawing inferences from the text as to its situation. On the other hand, one's presuppositions about provenance inevitably influence one's reading of the text.

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the problem. Fundamental to my approach is the assumption that Mark is the first of our synoptic Gospels. The ways in which Luke and Matthew have reappropriated his story are therefore of only incidental interest to my reading. Obviously if one disputes the priority of Mark, as does a small but vocal scholarly minority, the synoptic relationships have to assume a central place in interpretation. Similarly, assumptions concerning the time and place of Mark's composition, about which there is longstanding debate, are crucial. Rather than recapitulating the major arguments here, which any good commentary can provide, I will show in two

cases how divergent positions result in conflicting interpretations.

A major (though no longer dominant) school of thought believes that Mark was written in Rome by a Jewish author for a predominantly gentile audience. Those who assume this provenance interpret the presence of Latinisms in the text as confirming evidence—Mark would naturally use local idiom in writing to a Roman audience. If I concurred with this, my task would be to situate the production of the Gospel within the socio-economic context of a major Hellenistic city; the political context of the imperial capital under Nero (54–68 C.E.), the year of the four emperors (68–69), or Vespasian (69–79); and the ideological context of the second-third generation church in its interface with Roman society.

However, for reasons that will become clear in the course of my reading, I side with the growing number of scholars who place the production of Mark in or near northern Palestine; I refer the reader to H. Kee's discussion of this thesis for further reading (1977:176ff.). I therefore interpret the significance of the Latinisms differently; they indicate rather the expected linguistic penetration in the socio-economic and administrative spheres of the colonized culture of Palestine. My socio-political description obviously must focus upon conditions in agrarian Palestine—which, needless to say, were very different from urban Hellenism.

The matter of dating is still more difficult, but no less crucial. Whether or not one places Mark before or after 70 C.E., the date of the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple, has everything to do with how one interprets Mark's polemic against the temple. Those who date the Gospel after 70 C.E. typically argue that Mark was simply trying to justify the Christian community's theological rift with the Jewish cult. Those supporting Roman provenance also see an oblique endorsement of the Roman victory over the Jewish revolt that began in 66 C.E. In contrast, I hold that a date prior to 70 and during the revolt (thus after 66) is essential to the coherency of the political and economic ideology of Mark's narrative. Mark's vigorous criticism of the temple state and its political economy would obviously have been superfluous once the temple had been destroyed. I believe the general resistance to a pre-70 dating among scholars is an example of their (docetic) tendency to suppress the economic and political aspects of the text in favor of the theological.

It is necessary therefore to stipulate my own assumptions about provenance at the outset in order to explain the social description that follows, which in turn is to be used as background for reading the text. Because I believe there is some evidence for a more specific identification of Markan provenance with Galilee, I will focus the portrait below particularly on northern Palestine. Because of my pre-70 dating, I describe social, economic, and political conditions pertaining to Jewish society with the temple intact. In my conclusion I justify these assumptions in light of the evidence from the text, and attempt to sketch a more detailed historical portrait of Mark's community in its immediate social context.

To return to the original problematic, this does not yet solve how we can

correlate the world of Mark's story with the world of Mark, but it simplifies it somewhat: both are situated in late second-temple Jewish Palestine under Roman occupation. The fact that the Gospel is a work of "realistic narrative" (defined below, 3,B,ii) further reduces the disparity: the social worlds intrinsic and extrinsic to the text do in fact *roughly* correspond. Jesus and Mark lived within the same historical "era," which can be marked off by significant alternations in the socio-political character of life in Palestine. This era began with the death of Herod the Great (4 B.C.E.). The division of his domain into three tetrarchies, and the subsequent transfer of Judea to direct Roman administration with the ouster of Archelaus (6 C.E.), were accompanied by major outbreaks of socio-political unrest by Jewish nationalists, which continued sporadically until the outbreak of the Jewish revolt (66 C.E.). The era closed with the defeat of the rebels and the destruction of the temple by the Roman general Titus in 70 C.E.

In saying this, I am not overlooking the fact that the cast of specific historical personalities who appear in the Jesus story, such as the Roman procurator Pilate (in office 26–36 C.E.) or the native Jewish king Herod Antipas (ruled northern Palestine 4 B.C.E.–39 C.E.), had changed by the time of Mark. Events had also changed the general political atmosphere; what was sporadic, predominantly rural resistance to Roman colonialism in Palestine at the time of Jesus had coalesced into a major, Jerusalem-centered insurrection at the time Mark wrote. Nevertheless, the basic social structures and dynamics that characterized this era did not alter significantly. Prophetic sects and social banditry plagued the colonial administrators throughout. No major land or tax reform altered the relationships of production, though local economic conditions naturally fluctuated, and generally deteriorated as the revolt drew closer. And the major social groups that the Gospel mentions, usually by way of caricature, were present both in the time of Jesus and Mark, with the notable exception of an organized national resistance, which did not exist in Jesus' time.

There is then a fundamental structural, if not exactly historical, symmetry between the world in which Mark sets his story of Jesus and his own world. This made it all the easier for Mark to insert into his story of Jesus issues that were pressing in Mark's time. It is upon these general structural characteristics, as well as the specific circumstances of the revolt, that this chapter will focus. It is thus a *synchronic* portrait, describing the function of institutions and social dynamics, rather than a *diachronic* one, which would be concerned with the chronological shifting of persons and events.

ii. "Mapping" a Social World: Filters and Models

It is necessary to begin by acknowledging a few key problems involved in any broad social description. A detailed portrait would be a huge undertaking, for which one chapter is hardly adequate. The following is thus limited to generalizations, though reliable ones, about the social character of Roman Palestine

during this era, concentrating only upon those patterns most relevant to a reading of Mark. My portrait has been gleaned from the many comprehensive secondary sources dealing with this period, which I have cited; they give references to the primary sources for the reader who wishes to do further investigation.

All forms of narrative as we have seen are socially and ideologically conditioned, and historical discourse is no exception (above 1,D,iv). This presents two problems. The first has to do with the bias of our extrabiblical sources, particularly the major source of evidence for the era, the Jewish historian Josephus (Horsley and Hanson, 1985:xix–xx). His portrait of Palestinian social banditry or other elements involved in the revolt against Rome is no more or less caricatured than Mark's portrait of the Pharisees or high priests.

Modern historians have learned hermeneutic suspicion of these sources, but rarely turn the same critical light upon their *own* biases. This is the second problem: however scientific and dispassionate historians presume to be in their "reading and writing" of the past, they always employ "filters" by which they organize and interpret the great mass of diverse facts and events. Socio-scientific data are necessarily mediated by some kind of analytic framework, which, though only implicit, fundamentally determines the historical narrative (Elliott, 1986). T. Carney, in his important study of the historiography of antiquity, argues that the best way to control this factor is to employ models, which "bring values—in the subject matter and in its analyst—out into the open" (1975:xiv).

By model Carney means a general outline of characteristics, which outline (1) defines major components and their priority; (2) provides guidelines on their interrelationship; and (3) indicates a range of variance (ibid.:7). A model provides a kind of "map" to the foreign territory of a given historical era and social formation. My portrait will use models that are simple and thus perhaps relatively unsophisticated, but which have the advantage of being more intelligible to those uninitiated in the jargon of socio-scientific theoretics, especially the substructure-superstructure scheme of Marxist analysis.

My portrait makes use of a "matrix" model proposed by J. Elliott in his critique of G. Theissen's (1978) structural-functionalist sociology of first-century Palestine. Elliott's model is "designed to facilitate a more systematic comparison of the various interest groups . . . —not 'parties' or 'sects' but specifically *groups with distinctive interests*—which play key roles in the Palestinian social drama" (1986:20). He proposes the following four categories for analyzing these groups:

1. *socio-economic factors*: group constituency and size; geographic location; economic base and occupations; class, status; organization; roles, institutions;
2. *political-legal factors*: position and role vis-à-vis Jewish and Roman government; basis and exercise of authority; domestic and foreign relationships;

3. *culture, belief system*: pivotal values; accentuated beliefs and their symbolization; norms and sanctions; socialization and personality structure;

4. *strategy and ideology*: group interests, goals; tactics and foci of attention; oppositions; alliances, affinities; ideology (ibid.:18f.).

The weakness of this model is that it artificially categorizes social processes and groups, which are of course more organic—but this is unavoidable in descriptive sociological analysis. One can only caution against reification and overly positivistic use of categories, and then be explicit about why they have been chosen. For example, Elliott is self-consciously committed (and hence so am I) to a model that recognizes the “first importance [of] the material basis and economic relations of Palestinian life, then related social arrangements of collective activity, and then its modes of political control and symbol representation” (ibid.:17).

The greatest advantage of this model is that in comparing the social strategies of various groups, it affirms a conflict-based theory of sociology (from which the center-periphery metaphor is also derived). Rooted in the Marxist tradition, this approach stresses that social formations are defined by the competition among class, race, and gender interests. By contrast, the structural-functional school, dominant among Anglo-American scholars, presupposes:

Every society is a relatively persistent, stable . . . well integrated structure of elements. Every element in society has a function; it renders a contribution to maintaining society as a whole system. Every functioning social structure is based on a consensus of values among its members [Malina, 1981:19].

Such static models may be useful in characterizing the mechanisms of *dominant* institutions and ideological apparatus in a given social formation, but because they interpret social dynamics in terms of the maintenance of overall systemic equilibrium, they inevitably marginalize the role of dissenting groups. Social strategies of protest are explained by structural-functionalism as the adaptive response of less powerful groups, whose politics fill a cathartic function and pose little threat to the (basically sound) dominant social system. This approach has resulted in highly pejorative characterizations of the “sectarian” character of the primitive Christian communities (as in Theissen, 1978; see below, E,iv).

In keeping with my interest in strategies of social protest as expressions of ideological confrontation and struggle, my portrait will focus upon social *tensions* in each of Elliott’s four spheres as they were manifested in active or latent conflict in the Roman Palestine of Mark’s era. In the economic sphere I focus on the fundamental class disparities between the disenfranchised (often landless) peasantry and the (usually landowning) elite minorities (below, B,ii). In the geographical sphere I note the considerable tension between the en-

croaching patterns of Hellenistic urbanism and traditional agrarian society (B,iii). In the political sphere I portray the triangle of relationships between the uncommitted masses, the native ruling class, and the Roman imperial presence, against the backdrop of the Jewish revolt of 66–70 C.E. (below, C). I have drawn upon the excellent recent work of Horsley and Hanson on popular movements of social resistance and protest (1985). In considering the sphere of culture and belief systems, I turn to Belo’s model of the “symbolic order” of Judaism (below, D,i). The tensions within this order have to do with the competition for access to or control over what K. Burridge calls “redemptive media” (1969). My analysis concludes with a brief examination of the various ideological strategies of social groups as they negotiated these tensions (below, E).

iii. History as a Cross-cultural Exercise

One of the most serious shortcomings of historico-critical study of biblical antiquity has been the tendency to ignore cross-cultural factors. Anthropologists speak of two perspectives on cultural systems and discourses: that of “insiders” (the “emic”) and that of “outsiders” (the “etic”; Pilch, 1985:142). Too often biblical interpretation, for all its literacy in Greek and the philological arts, imposes its etic perspective upon the text, as we will see, for example, in the case of Mark’s healing and exorcism narratives (below, 4,B,i,ii). B. Malina has argued that we must learn to see Bible-study as a cross-cultural proposition. It is like “eavesdropping” upon conversations of ancient Mediterranean “foreigners,” and we cannot “presuppose that what they say embodies our modes of meaning as well” (1981:2).

This applies equally to socio-historical analysis. A good case in point are the modern competing analytical paradigms of Marxism and capitalism, both of which are etic:

They tend to assume the same framework of reference, that of the maximization of profit ethic of industrial society. This reference set assumes (or repudiates) the marketization of thought (e.g., “time is money”), the monetization of relationships (most goods and services are for sale) and a rising ceiling of expectations (a consumer orientation) [Carney, 1975:137].

The assumptions of market-exchange models are inappropriate to preindustrial Roman Palestine, which had a pluralistic economy. This included the clan-based “reciprocity system” and the “redistributive system” of a central storehouse economy (below, B,i; see Malina, 1986b).

The same caution holds for modern assumptions about what constitutes “political” discourse and action. Our ideologies of participatory democracy or social mobility too often control our definitions of what qualifies as a socio-political “movement.” We must take into account the fact that there was little

popular access to political decision-making (as we would understand it) in oligarchic republican Rome (Carney, 1975:214), and still less in colonial Palestine. Dissent appears only in what social historians (somewhat paternalistically) refer to as "prepolitical" forms. Instead of high-level abstraction in political and economic discourse, therefore, we must look in Mark for forms *indigenous* to the rural poor of Roman Palestine. We will see that parables and stories of symbolic action are not at all "prepolitical" (though they are "pre-scientific"), but the very stuff of social criticism.

The single most important cross-cultural axiom to be kept in mind is that our modern differentiation between the "sacred" and the "secular" does not represent the world of first-century Palestine:

In contrast to modern industrial society, there was no independent religious sector with its independent institutions, organizations, and social activities. In first-century Palestine, religion was instead embedded within all sectors of the system as a whole [Elliott, 1986:16].

It is difficult for us to lay aside our dichotomizing filters of church vs. state and faith vs. reason, but they wreak havoc upon any attempt to properly comprehend the socio-economic and political function of the symbolic order of late second-temple Judaism. No etic preconception has been more responsible for the failure of modern interpreters to recognize the political character of the Gospel, and no cross-cultural mistranslation has been more consequential for the life of the church (Maduro, 1979:54).

Another one of our unconscious etic assumptions is our post-Enlightenment preoccupation with the individual:

Instead of individualism, what we find in the first-century Mediterranean world is what might be called "dyadism." . . . A dyadic personality . . . would conceive of himself as always interrelated to other persons while occupying a distinct social position both horizontally (with others sharing the same status, moving from center to periphery) and vertically (with others above and below in social rank) [Malina, 1981:55].

The dyadic personality will figure decisively in a correct interpretation of many of Mark's conflict and healing stories (see below, 6,D,i). Overcoming rigidly individualistic anthropology also enables us to see the symbolic action of Mark's Jesus as simultaneously a specific gesture as well as a dramatic representation of a social problem (below, 4,B).

Political hermeneutics has tended to be weak when it comes to cross-cultural analysis. In its enthusiasm, it too often repeats the mistakes of previous "historical quests" for Jesus, fashioning the biblical world into the image of modernity, what liberation theologian Hugo Echegaray calls "the easy temptation of concordism, which equates the social groups and forces of first-century

Palestine with those of our own time" (1984:xi). This is especially true with the notion of "class struggle." For all the indications of popular unrest and resistance mentioned below, any interpretive framework having to do with "proletarian consciousness" is hopelessly anachronistic. But the same warning must be applied to one of my central concerns in this commentary—name the "lens" of "revolutionary nonviolence" through which I propose to look at Mark's story of Jesus.

Horsley is basically correct in pointing out that in first-century Palestine "one never posed an issue in such abstract reflective terms as whether one should act violently or nonviolently" (1987:319). The whole debate about violence and nonviolence, and the conditions that have given rise to it, is distinctive of modern—there is no getting around that. Thus my allusions to Gandhi's satyagraha as a "hermeneutical key" for interpreting Jesus' practice are quite self-consciously heuristic. Heuristic refers to models or frameworks that are *consciously preconceived*, the intention being to see if they are confirmed by data useful for interpreting data being analyzed. I believe (and here I disagree with Horsley) that this framework is not inappropriate for Mark, for though it does not reflect abstractly upon the question, his narrative clearly presents the practice of Jesus as socio-politically revolutionary without recourse to an organized strategy of violence. Moreover, I am persuaded that this framework is both suggested by, and fruitful for exegesis of, Mark's text.

In my treatment of this question, I have taken careful note of Horsley's objections against using the armed struggle of the "Zealots" as a convenient foil for presenting a nonviolent Jesus (*ibid.*:149ff.). At the same time, although Horsley is certainly correct that there was no organized military insurrection during the time of Jesus, there *was* one during the time of Mark, and so it is legitimate to assume that the evangelist's community took a stance vis-à-vis the revolt and its leaders, just as they did toward the other major social groups and practices (for further discussion of Horsley's theses, see Appendix, A). In sum, the most that can be concluded from this particular heuristic framework is that Markan ideology represents an *analogue* for our modern practice of revolutionary nonviolence; the hermeneutic imperative compels me to strongly assert that much. In any case, however we frame such questions, the Jesus story is always more radical when understood first in its own socio-historical terms.

2B. SOCIO-ECONOMIC TENSIONS

i. Political Economy

Carney, whose work I will draw upon heavily in the following sections, writes

The economies of antiquity contain what the economic anthropologists term "plural societies." These are societies in which the value systems of different communities within the population share no common ground. . . . Society and economy are held together, in such cases, by the

apparatus elite and the rigidly hierarchical social system. . . . Pluralism is produced by two things: regional subcultures and specific group lifestyles [1975:193].

The socio-economic valence of Roman Palestine was characterized by the complex interpenetration of the Hellenistic political economy of market-exchange and what Belo, following Marx, calls a "sub-Asiatic" agrarian formation. For Marx, the "Asiatic" mode of production was characterized by:

An opposition between the peasant class, which is organized into village communities (where relations of kinship play an important role in social organization), and the class-state, which directly appropriates the surplus for itself [Belo, 1981:60].

Belo calls Palestine "sub-Asiatic" because the state (Roman and Herodian) did not directly control agricultural production through infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, but instead appropriated surplus in advance through tribute, and controlled the exchange of goods.

Co-existing in the Asiatic sphere were two systems known by economic anthropology as "reciprocity" and "redistribution." Carney defines reciprocity as the clan-based system, which for Jews was rooted in tribal origins:

Among members of a family, goods and services were freely given (full reciprocity). Among members of a cadet line within a clan, gifts would be given; but an eye would be kept on the balanced return-flow of counter-gifts (weak reciprocity). Where distant tribal kin were involved, the element of watchful calculation grew greater, the time within which the counter-gift would have to be made grew less (balanced reciprocity). Outside the tribe mutuality ends . . . (negative reciprocity) [1975:167].

This "primitive" system, which characterized the tribal confederacy of Israel and is reflected in the law of Moses (Gottwald, 1979:293ff.), persisted in Palestinian village life in Mark's era. It determined that economic security and stability were bound up in the extended family household and kinship system.

Another, more developed nonmonetary system was that of redistribution. This was predicated upon the historical transition from tribalism to more stable and centralized communities, usually organized around a shrine or temple:

Initially a priestly group mobilized its labour force . . . to labour on the temple lands. The temple acted as central storehouse. Produce was stockpiled within that storehouse, and redistributed to feed the temple's nonagricultural work force (generally weaving women and artisans) as well as the agriculturalists who produced it. . . . As intensive settled

agriculture now became possible, the little temple-centered communities grew in size and complexity [ibid.:173].

This in turn gave rise to walled cities, royalty, and military classes. We see this development in Israel with the rise of the monarchy (see 1 Sm 8).

Redistributive economies were controlled by the king or priestly aristocracy; they set "value equivalences," protected trade routes, and regulated volume and personnel. Business was conducted by "emissaries of the palace-centered economies," not entrepreneurs. As we can see in the construction of both the first and second temple in Israel, this system:

Came to develop the logistical techniques for coordinating manpower, food, and material for huge building operations—always political because of their massive social implications. Among these techniques were the direction of labour . . . taxation, bureaucracy, and controls on transportation [ibid.:174].

Within this regulated economy, the rise of large landed estates, whose internal operation was also based on the redistributive system, had to be controlled.

We see both the large house-estates and the central storehouse systems functioning in Roman Palestine. The latter of course was represented by the Jerusalem temple, originally the redistributive system for agricultural production through the tithing system. This production was dry-soil (nonirrigated) farming, predominantly cereal culture but including dried fruits, olives, wine, flax, with some forestry, fishing, and animal husbandry. Galilee was the most naturally fertile agricultural region in Palestine. There was certainly some degree of latifundialization (large estates under foreign ownership), though how much is uncertain. Rome often awarded land taken by conquest to native dynasties, and landownership was increasingly concentrated in the hands of royal estates during and after the reign of Herod the Great (37 B.C.E.–4 C.E.). In Galilee there is strong evidence of persistent family-based small holdings, but land alienation and resultant tenancy was ubiquitous among the poor.

Like all preindustrial societies, Palestine was economically stagnant due to low productivity and lack of capital formation and specialization, all of which inhibited development. Attitudes in the villages, based on reciprocity, determined that cultivation was not for commercial purposes, but rather subsistence-oriented (see below). What trade surplus there was would have been controlled by foreign interests or state monopolies. Small producers had little or no access to export markets, which were in any case small due to high transportation costs and lack of technological means for preservation of goods. What little purchasing power there was, was dominated by the landed elites, and centered in the urban areas, with their small concentration of artisan class wage earners.

Indigenous social patterns in Palestine were already in the first century deeply transformed by the interface with the Hellenism, which began even

before Alexander the Great (mid-fourth century B.C.E.) and was thus well advanced by the time of Jesus. Despite the fact that most of the scholarly literature concerns itself primarily with cultural and philosophical issues, Martin Hengel insists that Hellenism was first and foremost a secular force (1974:55-57). Military culture and technology made a particular impact, especially because of the large influx of veterans into Palestine, whose pay or pension was often in land grants in colonial territories.

Though a market-exchange system, the slave-based economy of Roman Hellenism differed radically from modern wage-labor economies:

When the forces of production are based on slave labour, what we have is a political economy, in the sense that its relationships centre upon power and status rather than a maximization of profit [Carney, 1975:102].

More importance was attached to military affairs than to productivity; the availability of cheap labor predetermined the social milieu to be antitechnological. The business sector was characterized by "pariah capitalism," in which commerce was dominated by the state and its bureaucratic apparatus. This precluded the growth of a large business sector, and meant that the aristocracy consisted predominantly of "officialdom" (ibid.:103, 106).

Hellenistic administrative bureaucracies and their rigid hierarchies were widespread; the introduction of tax farming created local collaborative interests in colonized regions. In tax farming, rulers would lease out tax collecting rights in order to get the capital in advance from the lessee; "farmers" would then extract a profit in their collections. Under Roman rule, tax farming of tribute was abolished, but minor tolls and tariffs were still farmed out to local authorities. There is also evidence that Hellenism brought intensified economic exploitation of the land in order to develop some export trade. The subsequent romanization of Palestine planted a more commercialized and highly urban formation. In fact, David Rhoads points out that in the first century "the resettlement of new residents in these cities tipped the balance of population in Palestine in favor of non-Jewish residents" (1976:24f.), a situation that obviously portended trouble.

Reciprocity and redistribution are the systems most directly evident in Mark's narrative, though the Latinisms that pepper his semantic field indicate the impact of Hellenistic administration. Mark's economic criticism is directed more toward the "regional" than toward the imperial political economy, but the latter occasionally figures. It appears in the mention of absentee foreign landlords in a parable (12:1), the tribute dispute (12:14ff.), and of course allusions to the Roman military presence in Palestine (5:9f.).

ii. Class Relationships

Aside from the peasant majority, there was a very small independent artisan and bureaucratic class, and a tiny aristocracy, which of an estimated popu-

lation of seven hundred fifty thousand in Palestine made up less than one-half of one percent. The local ruling class after Herod was increasingly urban-based, and tended to accommodate the colonial forces culturally and economically. The rural peasantry on the other hand experienced hellenization as further economic marginalization and cultural isolation, especially in Galilee, as Freyne has shown (1980). The main socio-economic conflict was the economic threat to the traditional agrarian way of life posed by the urban oligarchy due to the economic vulnerability of small landholders and tenant workers.

Horsley sums up the process of land alienation and the resulting class stratification in Palestine:

There is considerable evidence, including the parables of Jesus of Nazareth, that by the time of Herod there had arisen many large landed estates. Simultaneous with the growth of these large estates there was a steady increase in population. Some peasant holdings were subdivided, but more often the younger brothers were left landless because of the inheritance laws. Moreover, large numbers of other peasants who had fallen into debt were forced into the ranks of the rural proletariat. Most of these became marginal day-laborers. Herod, and to a degree, his successors employed many of these in elaborate building projects. That these laborers, permanently uprooted from the land, formed a potential source of instability was a fact not lost on the ruling group. . . . Thus even without the factor of foreign rule there would have been intense hostility between the common people and the ruling gentry and chief priests [1981:416ff.].

The most prominent of the building projects referred to by Horsley was the reconstruction of the second temple, a project begun by Herod and still going on at the time of the revolt (Theissen, 1976).

Because the social location of the poor will be central to our reading of Mark, let us look at the portrait of peasant existence offered by Carney. Its "basic hallmarks" were "political powerlessness and straitened economic circumstances" (1975:198). Peasant families had three obligations for production. Above all they had to grow enough food to feed themselves and their animals, and to have seed for the following year's crop. Then there was the need for a surplus because of the demands of both the reciprocity and redistributive systems. At the village level, a little extra was needed:

To obtain the occasional iron implement or utensil, to contribute to the local festivals, and to make a loan to a neighbor in need. Only by contributing to festivals and making such loans could he acquire the reciprocal rights to call on his neighbor when himself in adversity . . . —peasant social insurance [ibid.].

But it was the elite-dominated surplus extraction that cemented the peasant's cycle of poverty. A Galilean tenant farmer could have up to half his harvest

extracted as rent. Small holders were subject to the land tax or tribute of Herodian kings or the *annona* of the Romans, either of which ranged from one-quarter to one-third of a harvest. Not included in this were the tithes to Jewish authorities, an obligation that (unlike the Sabbath) received no recognition from Rome. According to S. Oppenheimer (1977:23ff.) the tithing structure stipulated in rabbinic tradition was:

1. a tenth of the harvest as *terumah* for the priests;
2. a tenth of the remainder as a first tithe to the Levites;
3. a tenth of the remainder as a second tithe in the first, second, fourth, and fifth year, and the poor man's tithe in the third and sixth year of the sabbatical cycle.

In addition to all this were the various poll taxes and tariffs levied upon the small farmer when he took his produce to city markets.

These burdens were the principal cause of economic disenfranchisement among the peasantry. They also determined the distinctly stagnant aspects of the peasant way of life:

To make ends meet . . . the peasant had to keep his desires and living standards to an absolute minimum. Hence "primitive wantlessness," the very reverse of modern sedulously titivated consumer demand ever yawping after more goods to spur the industrial economy on. Hence, too, the peasant idea of the "limited good." This holds that all good things—food, land, honour, standing—are in fixed quantities and short supply. As their quantities cannot be increased, if one peasant gains a greater share of any one of them than heretofore, he is deemed to have done so at the cost of all his fellows. This notion is the cause of unending, unrelenting disingenuousness, struggle, and suspicion in peasant communities. . . . If an unusually large surplus is somehow produced, it is spent upon a festival, to propitiate the group [Carney, 1975:198f.].

The notion of limited good and the struggle for surplus serves as a dramatic backdrop to Mark's symbols of the "eschatological harvest" in the sower parable (below, 5,B,ii) and the "economics of satisfaction" in the wilderness feedings (below, 6,E).

Clearly, the burdens of the redistributive system were not felt as intensely by the urban and small artisan classes. Such disparities inevitably produced extreme socio-economic tensions. Despite the traditional loyalty among the rural classes to the Jerusalem cult, they were understandably suspicious of the interests of the landholding aristocracy:

The Galilean Jewish peasant found himself in the rather strange position that those very people to whom he felt bound by ties of national and religious loyalty, the priestly aristocracy, were in fact his social oppressors [Freyne, 1980:199].

Expressions of resistance among the poor varied, from noncooperation in tithing to organized brigandage and occasional local uprisings, as I shall discuss below (C).

iii. Geopolitical Conflicts

As noted, the center-periphery model also applied within Palestine itself. The more Hellenistic urbanism penetrated the colony, the deeper the contradictions grew between the different needs of city and village. The conflict was at once economic and cultural:

Those with disposable income were the elites, masters of the great estates with their household economies. So it is that the cities, where the elites reside and consume conspicuously, are economically parasitic upon the countryside in antiquity. For the cities consume, relatively, far more in luxury goods, taxes, and impressed labor than their craftsmen produce in artifacts. . . . There was, then, a marked cultural gulf, not just a lag, between town and country. . . . Different sectors of the populations of such societies each hold completely different, and mutually unintelligible, pictures of their "world" and life space. . . . The thought world and the social world of the military-bureaucratic elite and the subelite of large landowners with which the former was linked were quite different from and manifestly superior to, those of the peasant [Carney, 1975:102,100].

This tension was especially acute in Galilee, where the "breadbasket" of the plains was literally surrounded by newer Hellenistic cities (see Freyne, 1980).

Whether Ptolemais on the coast, or Herodian-established Sepphoris in the interior and Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, these cities were dependent upon the rural food supply in Galilee, and therefore determined to maintain geopolitical control. Josephus reports that village life in Galilee was densely populated, which gave rise to smaller cities (such as Caesarea-Philippi) as toparchies, or regional centers of government and administration (see *War*, III,iii,2; *Ant.*, XX,viii,4). As urban encroachment continued, the formal dividing line between city and village grew diffuse, forcing many to exchange clan identity for citizenship in the Hellenistic *polis*. The resentment among peasants as they watched the slow erosion of the social fabric of their agrarian way of life is reflected in Mark (below, 4,B,iii).

Also evident in Mark is the socio-cultural tension between Galilee and Judea. If for no other reasons than its geographical isolation and distance from Jerusalem and its greater level of intercourse with the gentile world, Galilee was regarded with general suspicion by the Jerusalem hierarchy (Freyne, 1980). To be sure, earlier historical portraits characterizing Galilee as wholly synonymous with the '*am ha' aretz*' (the rural poor who were despised in the rabbinic writings), or as the sole haven for revolutionary activity and sentiment, have been overturned (Oppenheimer, 1977). Nevertheless, there remains a great deal

of evidence in the literature of the period that demonstrates the generally second-class status of those who were from the north.

In sum, Galilee was doubly peripheral. It was increasingly controlled by the political and economic forces of Hellenistic urban penetration. Symbolically and socio-economically it was controlled by Jerusalem in the south. This makes it all the more remarkable that rural and village Galilee is placed at the narrative and ideological center of Mark's story, in explicit tension with both Jerusalem and the Hellenistic cities.

2C. SOCIO-POLITICAL TENSIONS AND THE JEWISH WAR

The political situation in Palestine during this era can be characterized by five major currents:

1. the waning fortunes of the native kingships;
2. direct and indirect Roman administration of the colony;
3. the power of the high priesthood and clerical aristocracy, including the Sadducean party;
4. the shifting political alignments of the Jewish renewal groups, especially the Pharisees and Essenes;
5. the various strands of popular resistance and dissent among the masses.

Each of these currents contributed to the rebellion of 66 C.E.

With renewed study of the social and political history of the period since the late 1960s, several issues have emerged around which there is considerable ongoing scholarly debate. Among those with a direct bearing upon a reading of Mark are questions concerning the definition and character of the Pharisaic movement and the origins of the main revolutionary parties. I refer the reader to the best recent discussions of these questions, J. Bowker's *Jesus and the Pharisees* (1973) and D. Rhoads's *Israel in Revolution, 6-74 C.E.* (1976). One current has been almost entirely neglected, however, which happens to be an important key to a political reading of Mark: grassroots nonelite forms of socio-political resistance to the dominant order. I will therefore give more attention to this current in my comments, and urge the interested reader to further consult Horsley and Hanson's important book, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (1985).

i. Occupied Palestine

After almost a century of independence under the Hasmonean dynasty following the Maccabean revolt from Hellenistic rule in 167-142 B.C.E. Jewish Palestine became subject again in 63 B.C.E. to the ascendant empire of Rome. At that time, after a brief struggle, Emperor Pompey established Hyrcanus II as a native client king and instituted the tribute. The Parthian empire overtook Palestine briefly in 40 B.C.E., but Rome reestablished control in 37 B.C.E. and then began the long and brutal reign of another client king, Herod the Great. Rhoads summarizes Rome's colonial interests in Palestine:

Table 1
Palestine, 4 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.
(all years in Table, C.E.)

Period of the Tetrarchies				
Emperor	Judea, Samaria, Idumea	Galilee and Perea	Northern Transjordan	Prominent High Priests
Augustus → 14	Archelaus, ethnarch → 6	Antipas, tetrarch → 39	Philip, tetrarch → 34	Annas 6-15
Tiberius 14-37	Pilate, procurator 26-36			Caiaphas 18-36
Caligula 37-41				Theophilus 37-41
Period of Direct Roman Rule				
Emperor	Procurator	High Priests	Political Events	
Claudius 41-54	Fadus 44-46		Theudas's movement, ca. 45? (see Acts 5:36)	
	Alexander 46-48		Famine, ca. 46; two Jewish rebel leaders executed	
	Cumanus 48-52		Jews (& Christians?) expelled from Rome; several (armed?) clashes in Palestine	
	Felix 52-60	Ananias 48-58	Rise of social banditry, prophets, sicarii; revolt of the "Egyptian prophet"	
Nero 54-68	Festus 60-62		Wilderness prophet executed; con- flict between Jews and Syrians in Caesarea	
	Albinus 62-64	six high priests, 59-66	Corruption and rural violence increase; feuding of revolution- ary factions in Jerusalem	
	Florus 64-66		General deterioration; riots in Caesarea and Jerusalem	
			Sacrifices to emperor cease, 66; provisional government	
Galba, year of 3 emperors, 68-69		Ananus	Zealot coalition rules, 68; revolt crushed, 70	
Vespasian 69-79		Phineas		

Israel served as a buffer state between the Romans and the Parthian Empire to the east. The Parthian Empire was the only remaining formidable threat to the extensive dominance of the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean world. . . . For these reasons it was important for the Romans to maintain good relations or firm control . . . especially so in light of Israel's reputation for being an unruly territory [1976:27].

As already mentioned, the era we are concerned with was bracketed by popular uprisings at the time of Herod's death (4 B.C.E.) and the full-scale rebellion beginning in 66 C.E.

Herod's kingdom was divided into three native tetrarchies. Two of these survived until the brief reign of Agrippa I, under whom Palestine was again united from 41–44 C.E. The third tetrarchy (Judea, Samaria, and Idumea) came under Roman administration following the ouster of Archelaus during popular revolt in 6 C.E. After 44 C.E. all of Palestine came under direct Roman rule. We might thus legitimately distinguish two periods on either side of Agrippa: the tetrarchies (the "time of Jesus") and direct Roman rule (the "time of Mark"). The principal personalities and events are listed in Table 1.

Mark's narrative bridges these two periods. In 6:14 he refers to Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (a detached territory south of the Decapolis on the east side of the Jordan). J. Brown writes of Antipas:

The original meaning of *tetrarches*, "ruler of the fourth part," had been lost, and it now marked its holder as ruling a Roman protectorate in a status inferior to that of a nominally independent king. . . . Through many shifts of Roman policy . . . Herod held his realm by favor of Augustus and Tiberius, and was removed by Caligula. . . . We can be sure that he paid the emperor tribute, but our sources give no figure. When first appointed . . . he was allowed by Augustus to keep only 200 talents annually from the taxes of Galilee and Perea; perhaps this was his private income, and the administrative budget, building program, and tribute were separate accounts [1983:360f., 363].

Antipas's contempt for Jewish dissidents is reflected in Mark's account of the execution of John the Baptist. The continuing colonial collaboration of the Galilean nobility after 44 C.E. is suggested in the Gospel's caricature of the "Herodians."

Mark also mentions Pilate, an Italian procurator of the equestrian order. As a general rule Roman administrators were less concerned with imposing Hellenistic values than with the tricky politics of colonial rule. Rome was relatively tolerant of the fierce exclusivism of the Jews; as long as the ultimate hegemony of Rome was recognized and the tribute paid, a modicum of local autonomy could continue. Rome remained, however, in firm control. The procurator had the power to appoint and depose the high priest, the symbolic leader of the Jewish polity, at will. He retained stewardship over the high priestly garments,

thus effectively controlling its functioning. In classic colonial fashion, Rome maintained exclusive authority over matters of foreign policy and serious domestic dissent (e.g., capital punishment; see below, 12,D).

Through the ever-present legions, barracked adjacent to the temple in Jerusalem, the imperial state could—and did—brutally crush any signs of insurrection. Two dramatic examples from the beginning and middle of the era suffice to illustrate the savage retaliation that followed attempts at armed resistance:

After Herod's death in 4 B.C.E. while the three sons were in Rome, the arsenal of Sepphoris was looted by Judas, son of the guerilla leader Ezekias who had been executed by Herod the Great. . . . The legate of Syria . . . marched south with auxiliaries from Beirut and Aretas IV retook and burned Sepphoris, and enslaved its people. . . . Antipas quickly rebuilt it and made it his capital until the founding of Tiberias; the *tektones* (carpenters and masons) of Nazareth must often have commuted [the four miles] there [J. Brown, 1983:362].

This incident has stirred the imagination of historians because of its close proximity in time and space to the birth of Jesus.

The second example, a series of violent clashes under the procurator Cumanus (48–52), dramatizes the cycle of revenge (Josephus, *Ant.*, XX,v,3–4). During the Passover feast in Jerusalem, provocation by a Roman soldier caused a riot of Jewish pilgrims. The restoration of order resulted in several Jewish deaths. Shortly afterward Jewish urban terrorists responded by murdering an imperial official traveling to the city. Cumanus's forces in turn pillaged several nearby villages and punished local officials. During these raids, a soldier desecrated a copy of Torah from a local synagogue, again infuriating the Jews and setting off a new round of protests. For failing to control these and other disturbances, Cumanus was eventually banished by Rome; Rhoads considers his tenure the turning point in colonial tensions (1976:70ff.).

For a political consideration of Mark's narrative it is important to point out that confrontations between Roman power and Jewish popular resistance almost always centered around "symbolic" actions, such as those mentioned above. Among other well-known incidents reported by Josephus are:

1. Pharisaic resistance to Herod involving the refusal of some to swear an oath to the emperor and the removal of the Roman golden eagle from the temple gate (*War*, I,xxxiii,1–3);
2. Pilate's allowal of Roman standards into Jerusalem in violation of the prohibition of images, provoking mass outcry (*Ant*, XVIII,iii,1–2);
3. the attempt by Emperor Gaius Caligula to erect a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple, occasioning widespread protest, including an agricultural strike in Galilee (*Ant.*, XVIII,viii,3; see below).

No symbolic action was more consequential, however, than the cessation of sacrifices to the emperor in the Jerusalem temple in June of 66 C.E. This was

tantamount to a declaration of insurrection, and it is this war that I will argue serves as the immediate historical context for the writing of Mark's Gospel.

ii. Popular Resistance

Horsley and Hanson (1985) criticize the fact that standard political histories of this era focus only upon the social groups who "left literary remains." They contend that the political problematic of Jewish Palestine cannot be characterized solely in terms of the conflicts between the so-called four philosophies (the priestly aristocracy, Pharisees, Essenes, and the Zealots). The standard "histories of the elite" ignore the fact that these groups represented only a small sector of the population, less than three percent, even if we include the entire aristocratic and upper artisan classes. Yet social historians routinely ignore evidence of popular social movements, including that attested to by Mark, or, if they are acknowledged, dismiss them as "apolitical" simply because they did not align themselves with the elite groups (Theissen, 1978). Rather than looking for prototypes of modern liberation ideologies (which we have no more chance of finding than prototypes of the internal combustion engine), we must learn to appreciate the forms of political expression available to the uneducated and poor majority who were structured out of the dominant mechanisms of social power.

The study of grassroots political culture was pioneered by sociologist E. Hobsbawm in his book *Primitive Rebels* (1959). Taking peasant movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hobsbawm looked at the various "primitive" or "archaic" forms of social agitation:

Banditry of the Robin Hood type, rural secret societies, various peasant revolutionary movements of the millenarian sort, pre-industrial urban "mobs" and their riots, some labour religious sects and the use of ritual in early labour and revolutionary organizations [1959:1].

Many of Hobsbawm's insights are adapted to ancient Palestine in the work of Hanson and Horsley.

One form of popular resistance of particular importance to Mark's era is "social banditry":

[It] arises in traditional agrarian societies where peasants are exploited by landowners and governments, especially in situations where many peasants are economically vulnerable and administration is inefficient. Times of economic crisis and social disruption (such as war) may produce banditry on an increasingly widespread scale. . . . Bandits usually enjoy the support of local peasants; far from aiding authorities in capturing the bandits, the people may actually protect them. Bandits share, and often symbolize, the peasant's basic sense of justice and religious loyalties . . . and at times social banditry accompanies or leads into peasant revolts [Horsley, 1981:412].

Evidence from Josephus indicates that social banditry was a persistent problem for the colonial authorities in Palestine from the time of Herod the Great. Horsley contends that it was a major tributary to the revolt in 66 C.E.: "The dramatic increase in banditry during the early 60s brought more and more of the population into open opposition to the established order. . . . In effect, it became a Jewish rebellion" (ibid.:427).

Horsley and Hanson further point out that Israelite popular kingship was itself predicated upon social banditry; David originally rose to power, they argue, as a brigand leader (1985:93; see 1 Sm 22:2). As discontent in the first century grew, social banditry continued to be fertile ground for the politicization of prophetic movements. On the eve of the revolt:

Josephus claims that now "the majority of people" (*hoi polloi*) practiced banditry, and that whole towns were ruined. . . . The banditry evidently took its toll on the gentry, for many wealthy Jews left their estates in search of safer surroundings among the Gentiles. With little to lose from increasing disorder, a sizable portion of the population had become outlaws. . . . Large groups of brigands already held sway as a dominant force in Galilee when Josephus arrived to take charge of organizing the defenses in 66-67 [ibid.:69].

Horsley and Hanson go so far as to compare the most prominent Galilean social brigand chief, John, who went on to become a rebel leader in Jerusalem, to the legendary *bandido* Pancho Villa:

The career of John of Gischala is strikingly parallel to that of Pancho Villa in the Mexican revolution of 1910. Both started as local brigands, but both were entrepreneurs of sorts, taking the opportunity of social turmoil to sell confiscated goods across the border and to exploit the wealthy for the sake of the common defense. They both rose to prominence as skillful leaders of popular insurrections [ibid.:84].

It is of utmost significance that the term used by Josephus as a technical reference to social bandits (Greek *lēstēs*) appears in Mark twice. In both cases the narrative context is one of implied subversive activity (14:48; 15:27; see below, 13,A,i).

Josephus mentions another form of armed resistance, the tactics of the *sicarii* or "dagger men" who specialized in urban political assassination. Horsley and Hanson compare the strategy of this group to that of modern Algerian or Palestinian anticolonial terrorists. The colonial situation had become so intolerable that secret societies took action against collaborators:

In all cases mentioned by Josephus, the *Sicarii* were highly discriminate and always directed their attacks against fellow Jews, not against Roman soldiers or officials. They employed three tactics in particular: (a) selective, symbolic assassinations; (b) more general assassinations along with

plundering of the property of the wealthy and powerful; and (c) kidnapping for ransom [ibid.:205].

This strategy served to break down the social security and solidarity of the ruling classes, and was no doubt partly responsible for their increasing defection to the Romans just before and during the war. As we shall see (below, 12.F.ii), Mark appears to portray Barabbas as a sicarius terrorist (15:7).

Besides armed organizations there were numerous spontaneous popular uprisings, not unlike the slave rebellions we know of in Rome. Often these were nonviolent, as in the case of Pilate's provocative move to introduce Roman standards into Jerusalem, which was vigorously protested by Jewish leaders. When he ordered his troops to surround the protestors and threatened them with death, Josephus reports that they willingly bared their necks rather than give in (*Ant.*, XVIII,viii,2-6). Petronius, Roman legate of Syria, was dispatched to Ptolemais with orders to enforce Caligula's wish to erect his own image in the Jerusalem temple, which would have certainly meant war. "Tens of thousands" of Jews came to Petronius in protest, vowing that the desecration of the temple would take place only over their dead bodies.

Petronius went to Tiberias in Galilee to consider the dilemma, and was again met by "tens of thousands" of Jews. Josephus reports the following exchange:

Then Petronius said to them: "Will you then make war with Caesar, despite our advanced preparations for war and your own weakness?" They replied, "We will not by any means make war with him; but still we will die before we will see our laws transgressed." And they threw themselves down upon their faces and exposed their throats, announcing they were ready to be slain [*Ant.*, XVIII,viii,3].

This protest went on for forty days, but the action that elicited the greatest concern among Roman authorities was the simultaneous agricultural strike in the countryside by (Galilean?) peasants, who refused to sow the next year's crops. The Romans were well aware that not only would this endanger the food supply in coastal cities, but also would intensify the economic pressure posed by the tribute obligations, and hence cause an even greater number of peasants to turn to brigandage. Petronius finally agreed to petition Gaius to change his mind, though in the end it was only the emperor's death that resolved the crisis. John Yoder probably goes too far in describing this incident as "a concerted act of resistance which this time had all the marks of a Gandhian campaign" (1972:92), but it does indicate the presence and vitality of nonviolent kinds of popular protest during the era.

iii. Prophetic Movements

Besides armed resistance and spontaneous mass protest, Horsley and Hanson identify a third form of popular dissent, which is equally crucial to

understanding Mark. These were movements whose primary expressions were prophetic and eschatological. The main literary groups (Pharisees, priestly class, Essenes) tended to focus upon canonical biblical prophecy. In contrast:

There emerged during the first century C.E. among the Jewish common people several prophets of two distinctive types. The individual prophets of the oracular type appear to be a continuation of the classical biblical oracular prophets, while the action prophets and their movements appear to be heavily influenced by biblical traditions of the great historical acts of liberation led by Moses and Joshua [1985:186].

Josephus, as part of the educated aristocratic class, was hostile to these movements, but despite his pejorative descriptions, it is possible to discern their popular political character. When interpreted against the backdrop of traditional prophetic symbolism, they are revealed as subversive, which explains why they were invariably suppressed by the Romans.

The "action" prophets, or what P. Barnett calls "Sign Prophets" (1981), were leaders who performed or promised symbolic acts that heralded liberation. Josephus mentions three important examples. During Pilate's tenure, a Samaritan prophet led an armed group up to Mount Gerizim, the traditional Samaritan site of eschatological restoration; there he promised to unveil "holy vessels" buried by Moses (Horsley and Hanson, 1985:162f.). This action was a symbolic articulation of Samaritan secession from the Jerusalem temple-based order, into which Samaria had been unwillingly incorporated since the time of the Maccabees. This was understood by Pilate, who quickly sent troops to crush the prophet and his followers before they could ascend the mountain.

Two decades later, under the procurator Fadus, a prophet named Theudas (mentioned in Acts 5:36) began a movement, promising to part the waters of the Jordan. Though unarmed, this movement was also dealt with militarily by Roman forces (ibid.:164f.). Theudas's prophetic symbolism was, like that of Mark's Jesus as we shall see, multireferential. On the one hand his promise recalled the action of Elijah in the context of building a subversive prophetic movement (2 Kgs 2:6-8); on the other it alluded to a new exodus from slavery, in the expectation that enemy troops would again be swallowed by the parted waters. The movement was doubtlessly in reaction to the colonial reconsolidation of Palestine under Roman rule after the short reign of the native king, Agrippa.

A third example took place under the procurator Felix, probably around 56 C.E., for it is also mentioned by Luke (Acts 21:38). A Jewish prophet identified with Egypt built up a large following of the rural masses in the wilderness, preparing to lead an (unarmed) assault upon Jerusalem, and promising that from the Mount of Olives he would command the walls of the city to crumble (ibid.:167f.). There can be no doubt about the subversive nature of these allusions, on the one hand to the Jericho military tradition of Joshua (Jos 6:15ff.), and on the other to the apocalyptic tradition of Zechariah, in which

Yahweh would fight against the pagan nations from the Mount of Olives (Zec 14; see below, 10,B,i). Roman intelligence discovered the plan, and a heavily armed contingent intercepted the march and slaughtered hundreds of the prophet's followers.

From these examples we can see a "clear pattern of symbolic correspondence between the great historical acts of redemption and the new, eschatological acts anticipated by these prophetic movements" (ibid.:171). In other words, their ideological strategy was to draw upon and reenact traditions of liberation that fired the hopes of the oppressed Jewish classes. Mark will do the same, invoking the tradition of the wilderness and other exodus themes, and portraying Jesus' actions in light of the great prophetic signs of the past (see below, 6,E).

Turning to the "oracular" prophets, the most obvious example is John the Baptist, who figures decisively in Mark's narrative. John appears to have taken after Elijah, who withdrew to the wilderness to gain "both personal strength and a prophetic commission to return to his people as the agent of revolution against an oppressive regime (1 Kgs 19)" (ibid.:140). At the same time, he also followed in the tradition of the classic oracular prophets such as Amos and Hosea:

Spokespersons for the peasantry and the covenantal social-economic policy that served to protect their interests. Because of the blatant exploitation of the peasantry, these prophets felt compelled to oppose the ruling class, which was failing to observe the covenant [ibid.:145].

Like the prophets before him, John was executed by the ruling classes (below, 7,B). Mark demonstrates a keen awareness of this prophetic legacy of opposition to the powerful and its consequences, using it as a kind of biblical "script" for interpreting the vocation of Jesus (below, 3,A,iii).

Immediately before and during the war there were many apocalyptic prophetic movements in and around Jerusalem. Josephus mentions a certain Jesus, son of Hananiah, a peasant who for some seven years publicly pronounced woe upon the city, in the tradition of Isaiah and Jeremiah (ibid.:173f.). The Jewish aristocracy tried to prosecute him, but the procurator Albinus only tortured and released him (in contrast to Jesus of Nazareth, who was executed!). Josephus notes the proliferation of prophetic oracles encouraging the war efforts once the revolt commenced, as well as the appearance of many wondrous portents, which were interpreted as either Yahweh's support of or opposition to the war effort, depending upon one's partisanship. In as much as there is ample literary evidence that the apocalyptic tradition was already widespread in this period (see below, 3,B,i), it is no surprise that there was an intense concentration of apocalyptic prophets at the time of the war. Mark vigorously engages these popular prophets in a war of myths over the proper interpretation of apocalyptic ideology and practice (below, 11,A).

iv. Ideologies of Popular Kingship

Closely associated with both armed resistance and popular prophetic movements was a fourth strand of dissent: the complex hopes surrounding the restoration of messianism and popular kingship. There is much confusion around this question because of the tendency of Christian scholarship to project the New Testament ideology of fulfilled messianic expectation back into the sources. In fact:

Recent studies have made clear that in pre-Christian times there was no general expectation of "The Messiah." Far from being uniform, Jewish messianic expectations in the early Roman period were diverse and fluid. . . . The designation *messiah* is not an essential element in Jewish eschatological expectation [Horsley and Hanson, 1985:90f.].

This does not mean that messianic discourse was not intelligible in the mid-first century; only that there was no one dominant concept to which Mark could appeal. Instead, there was an ongoing struggle over royal ideology within Judaism, and this is reflected in Mark's cautious and polemical appropriation of the designation "Messiah" (below, 8,C).

The same applies to the rubric "Son of David," which Christian interpreters have assumed was an accepted messianic title based upon *genealogy*. On the contrary:

[It] simply does not occur with any frequency in Jewish literature until after the fall of Jerusalem. . . . In contrast to the care and concern about legitimate descent and genealogy of the priestly and especially high priestly families in Jewish society at this time, it may be seriously doubted that there existed any families whose descent from the house of David could be confirmed. The point is that the imagery of a Davidic king symbolized substantively what this agent of God would do: liberate and restore the fortunes of Israel, as had the original David (ibid.:91).

Mark's own opposition to the temple-state explains his hostile treatment of the implied restorationist ideology of Davidic "sonship" (below, 10,B,ii,F,i).¹

Conflict over messianic ideology had to do with what *kind* of kingship was being proposed. In the biblical tradition itself there was a tension between the popular, provisional, and covenantal kingship model of the early Israelite tribal confederacy, and the dynastic, centralized, and hegemonic royal ideology of Davidism (see 1 Sm 8). Prophetic criticism of Israelite royalty continually raised the political question of legitimacy, arguing that the king's authority was based not upon a dynastic guarantee but rather his fidelity to "covenantal justice." In this sense the prophets were populist advocates:

When Jeremiah repeatedly delivered oracles of Yahweh that announced the punishment and end of the Davidic dynasty along with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, he appeared not only as a faithless heretic, but as an absolute traitor. . . . The fall of the Davidic monarchy could not have been as traumatic for the oppressed peasantry as it apparently was for the ruling elite, many of whom were taken into captivity along with the royal family [Horsley and Hanson, 1985:97f.].

Davidic/Messianic "restoration" thus meant different things to different classes. At the time of the Maccabean restoration of an Israelite monarchy, for example, "the fact that the Hasmonean high priests aggrandized their position by assuming the title of king provoked among their enemies, especially among the Pharisees and the Essenes, a revived expectation of the restoration of the true royal line, the House of David" (R. Brown, 1977:506).

In Mark's time the discourse of popular kingship from the perspective of the Roman colonizers obviously functioned subversively. The priestly aristocracy, if they were interested in it at all, saw native kingship in terms of the widening of their institutional power and privilege. To some of the leaders of the revolt, restored kingship may have articulated a vision of independence, perhaps even expansive regional hegemony, as under the Maccabees. But to the peasant masses it would have been the symbol for the establishing of justice and equality in Israel. It is this latter perspective that is adopted by Mark, who identifies the messianic vocation not with ruling class dynastic-royal ideology, but rather with apocalyptic resistance ideology and prophetic solidarity with the poor. Mark's Messianism thus repudiates the "son of David" designation in favor of Daniel's "Human One" (below, 8,C,ii, D,ii).

Mark's Gospel suggests a community influenced by each of these popular forms of resistance. Aspects of these movements and the environment that produced them are reflected throughout his text: from the murdered oracular prophet John to the sicarius assassin Barabbas; from the "false" sign-prophets to the true prophetic symbolics of Jesus; from the ideologically significant space of the wilderness to the politically charged atmosphere of Jerusalem at Passover. Above all we see it in the struggle over messianic discourse and practice that pervades the narrative.

2D. THE HISTORICAL MOMENT OF MARK: THE REVOLT OF 66-70 C.E.

In light of the above, we can see that the forces at play in Palestine on the eve of the revolt were much more diverse and complex than suggested by the standard portraits. Recent historical studies have made two things clear: (1) resistance to Roman domination took a wide variety of forms, and often was quite unconnected to the politics of the literate groups; (2) subversive activity was in most cases also directed at structures of class oppression within Jewish

Palestine. Nor can we any longer attribute every incident of sporadic resistance during this era to an alleged "Zealot party":

A unified and decades-old liberation front . . . seen to be a modern fiction with no basis in historical evidence. . . . This view has served an important function in the concerns of many modern theologians and biblical scholars. As the supposed fanatical advocates of violent revolution against the Romans, the "Zealots" served as a convenient foil over against which to portray Jesus of Nazareth as a sober prophet of pacifist love [Horsley and Hanson, 1985:xv,xiv].

On the contrary, once we learn to read the discourse of popular movements of dissent in Palestine, it will reveal that Mark's Jesus had much in common with these currents of popular dissent, and can be historically interpreted only in light of them.

As already stipulated (above, A,i), it is one of my central theses that Mark was written during the period of the Jewish revolt. Because of the importance of this historical moment, both to an understanding of Mark and to the era itself, I will in this section depart from my synchronic account of this era to offer a brief portrait of the events of the war period. Drawing from the Rhoads narrative and the Horsley and Hanson narrative, both based upon the histories of Josephus, I divide the short four-year period of "liberated Judea" into two parts: the pre-Zealot provisional government and the rise of the Zealot coalition. This serves to emphasize the internal struggles of the insurrection, which will prevent us from taking a simplistic view of the dynamics of the revolt.

i. The First Two Years: The Provisional Governments

Several factors conspired to make the revolt inevitable: the poor economic and political performance of, and endemic corruption within, the Roman colonial administration; the equivocation and exploitation of the collaborating Jewish elite; and the diverse currents of resurgent Jewish nationalism and peasant disillusionment. Since the near debacle in 40 C.E. under Emperor Caligula, Jewish-Roman relationships had been increasingly volatile. They deteriorated under the procurator Cumanus (48-52 C.E.), fed by the fact that the Jews (probably including the Christians) had recently been expelled from Rome. Palestine now saw the first armed clashes between Roman regulars and Jewish brigands since the uprisings of 6 C.E. Josephus reports a sharp rise in social banditry throughout the countryside under the next three procurators. Finally, under Florus (64-66 C.E.), rural resistance reached epidemic proportions, especially in Galilee, where Roman military attempts at suppression only increased rebel sentiment.

In the spring of 66, fighting broke out between Jews and Greeks in the coastal city of Caesarea; pogroms followed in several cities in the region.

Florus, in May, under orders from Emperor Nero, attempted to expropriate funds from the temple treasury in Jerusalem. Mass demonstrations resulted, in which Jewish civilians were ruthlessly put down by Roman crack troops, who also tried to storm the temple. Clerical leadership was radicalized, and attempts to dissuade them from breaking with Rome by Agrippa II failed. Rhoads describes what happened in June:

With the populace in a rebellious mood, the control of the city left in the hands of the high priests supported by a Roman garrison, and Agrippa banished from the city—the lower priests took action which was tantamount to a declaration of war. Led by the Temple captain, Eleazar, son of Ananias, and supported by the revolutionary leaders of the populace, they decided to refuse any further gifts or offerings from gentiles—including the sacrifices offered twice daily on behalf of the Roman empire and emperor [1976:74].

The revolt had begun.

It is true that the various tributaries to the Jewish insurgency were neither well organized nor coordinated: the rural social brigands, the urban terrorist groups, and their more moderate sympathizers among the aristocracy and literate groups, represented disparate interests. Still, the revolt would have been short-lived had it merely been a spontaneous uprising among various sectors. In fact, a provisional government was established in, and the war was prosecuted from, Jerusalem, and became a central point of reference for all Jewish social groups, within and outside Palestine, Mark's community included. The atmosphere of polarization made neutrality increasingly impossible between the Jewish liberation struggle and the forces of imperial law and order.

But almost from the beginning the provisional government in Jerusalem was racked by internal struggles for power, as the contradictions among the various rebel protagonists became political rifts. From this perspective, the drama of the revolt was as much centered around the warring factions in the city as around direct military engagement with the Romans. There were unquestionably elements of class conflict present in the insurrection.

According to Rhoads's reconstruction of events (1976:100 ff.), Eleazar's attempt to exclude the traditional high priestly aristocracy from the temple cult resulted in civil war. In August, sicarii from around Judea joined with Eleazar and successfully dislodged the clerics from control of the upper city, putting the Roman procurator and the royal collaborators to flight. The rebels promptly burned the public archives, where the records of debt were kept. This action again indicates the character of the insurrection also as a protest against socio-economic oppression. A sicarius leader by the name of Menahem took over leadership and attacked Herod's palace, but then attempted to impose himself as king (below, 10,B,i). This bid was rejected and Menahem killed, his troops taking refuge in nearby Masada. Eleazar reassumed leadership and negotiated

the surrender of the remaining Roman forces—and then massacred them.

In October 66 the first Roman attempt to quell the revolt by mounting a siege of Jerusalem failed, resulting in a rout of the imperial forces (below, 11,A,ii). This unexpected victory brought some in the aristocracy over to the rebel side, and the traditional high priestly caste recaptured control of the government and cult. Another Eleazar, son of Simon, and a priest, now assumed an important role in the provisional government. The extent to which the aristocratic leadership was actually consolidating the revolt is questionable, however; it may well be that "by ostensibly assuming the leadership of the revolt (including preparation of defenses against the inevitable attack by Rome), they attempted to control and channel the rebellious energies of the people until they could negotiate with the Romans" (Horsley and Hanson, 1985:43).

Meanwhile, Josephus was dispatched by the provisional government to command rebel forces in Galilee. Josephus complains that he found it difficult to coordinate and win the trust of the various brigand bands, but this was probably due to the fact that his own loyalty to the revolt was suspect:

Because of their own military strength, political leverage on the Galilean peasantry, and their alliances with other rebel forces, the brigand groups constituted the most important insurrectionary force in Galilee. Josephus' real strategy was to control the Galilean situation, with the assistance of its gentry, and to avoid direct military action against the Romans until negotiations with them were possible. . . . The result, of course, was a standoff between the brigands (who must have been aware of his double game) and Josephus himself with the Galilean notables, who were attempting to hold the lid on the rebellion. That standoff ended when the Romans reconquered Galilee the following summer (67), and Josephus was able to desert to the enemy and write his memoirs [Horsley and Hanson, 1985:80].

Sporadic brigandage continued in Galilee after repacification, but the main rebel forces fled south to take the last stand in liberated Jerusalem.

ii. *The Second Two Years: The Zealot Coalition*

The Romans relentlessly pursued a policy of scorched earth in their pacification of the rebel areas. They spared only those who offered full collaboration (usually the local aristocracy); those (usually peasants) unable to flee were slaughtered or enslaved. Not unlike the effects of the "strategic hamlet" tactics of modern U.S. counterinsurgency:

The Romans in effect created the phenomenon of dispossessed fugitives forced to plunder their own former territories now in the hands of the pro-Roman factions. These brigands now had virtually no alternative but to fight against the Roman advance. . . . Once they had fled, it was

impossible for them to return to their villages and towns, which had either been destroyed or were now in the hands of their wealthy enemies who had deserted to the Romans. . . . The brigand groups formed and operated in areas which the Romans had not yet completely "pacified." But as the Roman forces advanced farther into Judea, the brigand bands were eventually forced to seek refuge in the fortress-city of Jerusalem itself [ibid.:222f.].

Horsley and Hanson contend that it is this influx of desperate and disillusioned rural rebels that accounts for the ascendancy of a Zealot coalition in Jerusalem.

Under the leadership of Eleazar ben Simon, the Zealots overthrew the provisional government in a coup in the winter of 67-68. They then began a systematic purge of the aristocratic elements remaining in Jerusalem, commencing what from the perspective of Josephus was a "reign of terror," resulting in the wholesale defection of those who had economic interests to protect:

Many people were inclined to desert to the Romans; some of them sold even their most valuable possessions for relatively little, and swallowed pieces of gold, that they might not be discovered by the rebels. Then when they had escaped to the Romans, they emptied their bowels, and thereby had abundant means with which to provide for themselves. And Titus allowed many of them to resettle wherever they wished around the country. . . . But the rebels and their leaders were more vigilant for these deserters that went with the Romans. If someone was at all suspected, his throat was immediately cut [*War*, V,x,i].

Josephus mentions that the particular focus of the Zealot purge was the Herodian nobility, with whom old scores were settled. "The Zealots, no matter how much their struggle was against the alien Roman oppressors, were first fighting a class war against their own Jewish nobility" (Horsley and Hanson, 1985:225f.).

The socio-economic dimensions of Zealot radicalism are also indicated by the direct challenge to the priestly elite by electing a commoner, by lot, to the position of high priest. Here was a move by rural dissidents to overthrow the control of the urban clergy over the temple state, and an attempt to establish a more democratic and popular administration of the temple state. This resulted in yet another civil war within the city, in which the priestly establishment mounted forces that drove the Zealots back into the temple precincts. The Zealots then called upon rural supporters from the southern province of Idumea, who responded by entering the city and reestablishing Zealot control. More purges followed, directed at the former leaders of the provisional government, who were (probably rightly) suspected of plotting to surrender the city to the Romans.

Internal power struggles, however, continued to plague the Zealots. A brigand chief from Galilee, John of Gischala, vied for sole leadership. Meanwhile, another Judean brigand, Simon bar Giora, was amassing formidable forces in the countryside, and surviving members of the local Jerusalem power structure conspired to persuade Simon to overthrow the Zealots. With the second Roman siege of the city imminent, in the spring of 69 Simon launched his counter-coup and successfully forced the Zealots back into the temple:

For a time there was a three-way battle raging, with the main body of the Zealots in the inner court of the temple above, John of Gischala and his followers in the temple courtyard in between, and Simon bar Giora in control of most of the rest of the city [ibid.:219].

Throughout the rise and fall of provisional governments, the temple was the center of the struggle for political control.

Once the final siege began under the Roman General Titus, the factions were forced to cooperate. But lack of resources and slow starvation beleaguered those now trapped in the city, as the Romans cut off all avenues of escape and resupply. According to Josephus's unabashedly pro-Roman account, Titus took great pains to persuade the remaining rebels to give up and avoid the desecration of their city and temple (*War*, VI,ii-iii). After several unsuccessful attempts to storm the temple, the Romans burned it to the ground and looted it. The city was plundered, the rebel leaders executed, and a great part of the population enslaved. The revolt was crushed.

It is unhelpful to caricature the war either as the misguided fanaticism of a few malcontents, as did Josephus and later imperial scholars who relied upon his account, or on the other hand as a heroic and progressive insurgency of popular forces. This period of "liberation" was relatively brief, largely restricted to Judea, and riddled with contradictions. But all of Palestine, whether actively in solidarity with the revolt or not, was profoundly impacted by the war. The poor, as usual, suffered greatly, especially the peasantry of Galilee. Distant from the drama of power-broking and ideological struggle in Jerusalem, they were left defenseless before the avenging wrath of the Roman counterinsurgency program, betrayed on the one hand by their regional rebel commander Josephus who defected to the Romans, and on the other by brigand leaders such as John who abandoned Galilee to join the struggle in Jerusalem. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that someone such as Mark, writing from the perspective of the Galilean poor, might well have brooked little hope in the insurrection.

2E. SOCIO-CULTURAL TENSIONS: THE SYMBOLIC ORDER

To return to my structural portrait of Roman Palestine, an essential aspect of the social formation, which is perhaps more important than any other for a political reading of Mark, is the dominant ideological system and its vehicles

within Palestinian Judaism. Here I wish to nuance Elliott's matrix with yet another matrix model of Belo, whose analysis of the "symbolic order" is his most important contribution (1981:37ff). By symbolic order Belo means the values and norms—in the language of social semiotics, "cultural codes"—both implicit and explicit, which regulated and represented social life and meaning. In this section I will try to interpret Belo's basic insights, modifying and expanding his model. Throughout this discussion, it is necessary for the reader to keep in mind that in cross-cultural interpretation, the symbolic order is usually difficult to comprehend because its intelligibility relies entirely upon a semantic and social universe foreign to ours. For this reason, I begin with a brief hermeneutic discussion of "socio-symbolics" from an anthropological perspective, that extends and applies what I have discussed in chapter 1.

i. What Is a Symbolic Order?

As we have seen (above, 1,C), symbols as expressions of social order, anxiety, or meaning are everywhere used in modern society, but largely unacknowledged. Anthropologist M. Douglas is foremost among interpreters of the "concordance between symbolic and social experience," which according to her is usually articulated through the natural symbols of the human body and its parts (1973:16).

Though I find her "grid and group" sociological modeling overschematic, her general thesis is instructive—namely, that every society has symbolic systems that function in the following basic ways:

1. defining and reproducing social power through the symbolics of hierarchy and organization;
2. maintaining group boundaries through the symbolics of "danger" or taboo;
3. ordering and giving social meaning to the chaotic universe of material things through the symbolics of "contagion."

Ideological discourse then lends overall coherency and plausibility to the symbolic order, which is both a reproduction of, and shaping force in, concrete economic, political, and social relationships.

The symbolic order of capitalism is a complex network of assumptions about the relative value of material things (natural and fabricated) and persons, from the high abstractions of "cold war" political dualisms, to U.S. immigration law's floating definitions of "insiders" and "outsiders" (depending upon economic conditions), to the way in which an American middle-class kitchen is organized. Every national holiday and patriotic event, every ritual of pomp and parade, every liturgy of remembrance or election serves to remind us of this system. Its structures and discourses socialize individuals and groups to conceive of their vocation according to prescribed values and limits set by class, race, and gender.

Social anthropologist K. Burrige speaks of institutional vehicles of the symbolic order as "redemptive media," through which the discharge of obliga-

tions is facilitated (1969:6). The U.S. Constitution for example might be seen as a redemptive medium. It functions (ostensibly) to define and guarantee individual and collective "rights"—an invisible but socially efficacious symbolic notion. This "sacred" document is a representation of the ideology of "liberty and justice for all." It is not hard to understand how groups that take (or are given) the task of administering and interpreting the redemptive media accrue considerable social power. Thus in our society the powerful groups include politicians and lawyers (not unlike Mark's Palestine, in which the redemptive medium of Torah was controlled by the scribal class; see below, iv).

In considering the symbolic order of ancient Palestinian Judaism we will encounter the discourse of "debt" and "purity." The cultural code of debt articulated social organization and hierarchy, and is not entirely alien to our modern social formations. Unlike the Israelite notion of debt, however, which was rooted in the practice of reciprocity and gift-exchange (below, iii), our modern debt code is based upon an ideology of social contract and a political economy of market-exchange. Thus we instinctively think of debt in economic terms. Whereas in ancient Palestine social power was exclusively determined by kinship and class, today it is usually based upon material accumulation. Thus the "captains of industry" gain prestige according to ability to control markets and labor, rather than traditional assets such as physical strength, family line, or even education (though all these things can help). Yet in fact debt does include notions of legal obligation and moral duty in our social world. There are the imperatives of "citizenship," expressed as what we "owe to the country," such as military or civic service, and in the name of social contract, we cede social or political power to qualified "authorities."

Modern persons have a much greater difficulty appreciating the concept of purity. Malina describes it as:

Specifically about the general cultural map of social time and space, about arrangements within the space thus defined, and especially about the boundaries separating the inside from the outside. The unclean or impure is something that does not fit the space in which it is found, that belongs elsewhere, that causes confusion in the arrangement of the generally accepted social map because it overruns boundaries [1981: 125].

Purity first concerns ordering the material world around us. The Mosaic law, with its elaborate rituals concerning cleansing, appears odd to the modern worldview—few of us find Leviticus intelligible, much less inspiring. We think of "taboo" as relegated to archaic religion; yet if I come and dump a pile of dirt or manure on the living room carpet of a suburban home, there will certainly be a reaction of horror.

Douglas rejects the argument that this reaction is based not upon a symbolic system but concern for "hygiene and aesthetics":

Dirt is the by-product of a systemic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity. We can recognise in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. It is a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining room table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room . . . out-door things indoors . . . under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications [1966:35f.].

Douglas offers similar modern analogies to the segregation of the anomalous in the Levitical distinctions between certain cloven footed animals (ibid.:41ff.).

Notions of "clean and unclean" (or order and chaos) in the material world also apply to the body politic, functioning to establish and maintain group boundaries and communal identity. Our "advanced" social mores still tend to prefer segregation of the physically and mentally disabled. Expected modes of dress and behavior in certain places, which we call "etiquette," in fact function to enforce a bourgeois purity code of class separation. Today group boundaries are no less efficacious for being implicit. A white matron who roams freely on the wide avenues of the suburbs would walk furtively and anxiously on the sidewalks of a black urban ghetto—if she ventured there at all. Indeed, de facto racial segregation is the norm in most parts of the U.S.A. today despite the absence of state sanction. And, as in ancient Israel, modern purity codes function politically as well as socially. The very same myths of "chosenness" that shape patriotic ideologies in the U.S.A. also shape the dreams of neo-Nazi white supremacists and the social codes of Afrikaaner apartheid. And what about the socio-symbolic apparatus of our national security state, with its "priesthood" of the security-cleared and its "holy places" surrounded by barbed wire?

This brief discussion has been intended to make the notion of socio-symbolic codes, so crucial to a political understanding of the gospel, more meaningful to the reader. Obviously there are vast differences between our symbolic order and that of ancient Judaism. But we must learn to see the analogies; as Douglas puts it, when it comes to purity there "are no special distinctions between primitives and moderns: we are all subject to the same rules" (ibid.:40). Only by a critical consciousness of our own symbolic order (elaborating what is culturally invisible), she says, can we be true social critics:

The elaborated code provides a means of assessing the value of one kind of social process, the codes derived from it, and the values and principles

that go with both. . . . The elaborated code challenges its users to turn round on themselves and inspect their values. . . . This would seem to be the only way to use our knowledge to free ourselves from the power of our own cosmology. No one would deliberately choose the elaborated code and the personal control system who is aware of the seeds of alienation it contains [1973:190].

Interestingly, Douglas is especially critical of the failure of contemporary theology to provide this critical function: "The theologians who should be providing for us more precise and meaningful categories of thought are busy demolishing meaningless rituals and employing the theological toolchest to meet the demands of anti-ritualists" (ibid.:188). This confirms my contention (above, 1,C,iii) that the proper vocation of theology is not demythologization, but critique, creation, and redemption of socio-symbolic discourse. This is exactly what Mark's Jesus was about in his context.

ii. *The Symbolic Order of Ancient Judaism: A Matrix Model*

I return now to a consideration of Belo's model of the dominant symbolic order of Palestinian Judaism. As noted, he builds it around the two interpenetrating and mutually reinforcing systems of debt and pollution (purity).

The debt code regulated social aggression and formed the basis of the covenant paradigm with Yahweh, including the Ten Commandments and other socio-ethical elements of the law. It was originally rooted in the primitive peasant political economy of reciprocity, and sought to promote justice and equity in the community. As Belo exposit it:

The earth which humans till and on which they live with their livestock can only *receive* the rain which is given to it to make it fruitful; thus a *gift* is the source of fruitful blessing. This basic fact explains the *principle of extension* that rests on the notion of giving; it says that what Yahweh has given to human beings, they must in turn give to their fellow humans who lack it. . . . The victims [sacrifices] and tithes given to Yahweh, the sabbath and feasts on which people stop working so that they may give the time to Yahweh—these simply make evident the gift that lies behind people's work and their abundance at table. . . . At the same time, the giving of people helps them avoid coveting the abundance of others—their property, their lives, their blessings. Giving thus forestalls violence against the neighbor, the brother, the equal. This equality between people and "houses" is the purpose of the principle of extension: "Let there be no poor among you" (Dt 15:4) [1981:50].

The pollution code had its ideological basis in Israel as a "holy" people, set apart from the surrounding cultures and their contrary (idolatrous) social practices. Thus the great variety of complex rituals essentially functioned for

the same purpose: to reinforce group boundaries. At the same time, as we have seen, the socio-symbolic taboos functioned to maintain internal order in the world. This will have specific importance when we examine Jesus' symbolic action (below, 4,B).

Belo observes that these two systems operated in three basic social spheres or "sites": the "table" (e.g., the production and consumption of goods), the "house" (e.g., kinship and community relations), and the "sanctuary" (e.g., the temple cultus and the priesthood). I have expanded these sites into land/table, village/house, and synagogue/sanctuary, in order to suggest correlation to recurring narrative sites in Mark's Gospel (see below, 4,B,iii). By laying out this matrix, one is able to locate within it virtually every element in the Levitical code as in Diagram 2. It helps us see the function of the ideological system in all spheres of social existence.

Diagram 2
Elements of the Levitical Code

	Pollution/purity	Debt/gift
Land/ table	dietary taboo (Lv 11,17)	tithe; Jubilee/Sabbath (Lv 23, 25, 27)
Village/ house	sexual/body relations (Lv 12-15)	socio-ethical statutes (Lv 18-20)
Synagogue/ sanctuary	idolatry/blasphemy; priests (Lv 21-22, 24, 26)	cultus; sacrifice (Lv 1-10)

The two main institutional "vehicles" in which the symbolic order was objectified and in which its authority was invested were the law (Torah) and the temple, which represented, respectively, the covenant and presence of Israel's God. As the primary redemptive media, they defined (in the case of law) and controlled (in the case of temple, through propitiatory sacrifice and other symbolic actions) debt and impurity in the body politic. S. Isenberg (1973) has shown how the various factions among the elite in Roman Palestine competed for influence and control over the symbolic order in order to increase their social and political standing. Other groups simply struggled for access to the redemptive media, or disputed the authority of the elite over them. Occasionally a group would challenge the system as a whole as well as its stewards; Mark is a case in point. Even Mark, however, is selective; he rejects the temple as an institution, but not the Torah, instead challenging the elite in their interpretations of the sacred texts. Let us briefly look at some of these social tensions in relation to the dominant ideological systems.

iii. Purity and Debt

J. Neyrey, similarly drawing from Douglas's anthropology, has provided an excellent sketch of specific Jewish "purity maps" as they relate to Mark (1986). He argues that from the rabbinic literature we can reconstruct several socio-symbolic systems: "Jews could be identified by special *times* (Sabbath), special *things* (diet) and special *bodily marks* (circumcision)" (ibid.:100). In *m. Kelim* (1:6-9) a hierarchy of places is given in order of ascending holiness: "The *Land of Israel* is holier than any other land," after which come the walled cities of Israel, space within the walls of Jerusalem, the temple mount, the rampart, the court of women, the court of the Israelites, the court of the priests, between the porch and the altar, the sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies (ibid.:95). We cannot miss here the center-periphery structure of this map, and its geopolitical implications for both Mark's world and his story-scape (above, B,iii).

The *t. Megillah* (2:7) ranks *persons* according to purity: (1) priests; (2) Levites; (3) Israelites; (4) converts; (5) freed slaves; (6) disqualified priests (illegitimate children of priests); (7) *netins* (temple slaves); (8) *mamzers* (bastards); (9) eunuchs; (10) those with damaged testicles; (11) those without a penis (ibid.). The place on this list of the physically impaired (not to mention the general exclusion of women) should be kept in mind when we examine Jesus' attitude toward such disenfranchised groups (below, 4,B,ii; C). In *m. Kelim* (1:3) there is a relativizing of pollution derived from contact with *things*: impurity contracted from a dead thing is exceeded by that from a menstruant, which is exceeded by bodily issues such as semen, urine, spittle, and so on. Finally, *times* are ordered in the Mishnah, with Sabbath considered most sacred, followed by Passover, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, festival days, Rosh ha-Shana, and so forth (ibid.:99).

These various maps are all assumed in the world of the Gospel, in which almost every episode narrates Jesus' transgression or criticism of these boundaries and divisions. Oppenheimer, in his careful social history of the late second-temple period, draws the following important conclusion concerning the purity code:

The great strictness characterizing matters of ritual purity and impurity, the difficulty of complying with it, the danger of transferring ritual impurity from one person or object to another, all this led to a situation whereby ritual impurity became the guiding principle in the division of Jewish society into classes [1977:18].

He points out that the sheer "profusion of these laws, and the difficulty of observing them" inevitably marginalized the masses. The major obstacles to rigorous conformity to the demands of the symbolic system for ordinary persons were economic. The daily circumstances of their lives and trades, especially for the peasantry, continually exposed them to contagion, and they

simply could not afford the outlay of either time or money/goods involved in ritual cleansing processes.

Groups wishing to control the redemptive medium of purity recognized these practical difficulties, and responded in sharply divergent ways. The Pharisees attempted to extend the purity code to the masses by liberalizing it in order to facilitate observation, a program that relied upon the elaborate interpolations of their oral tradition and their distinctive rituals. This contrasted sharply with the strategy of the Sadducean elite, which assumed that only the priestly caste could, and therefore should, comply with the demands of purity. Predictably, the Sadducees refused to recognize the legitimacy of Pharisaic oral tradition, for it threatened their exclusive hegemony over the symbolic order.

The economic and political self-interest that lay behind this competition is neatly demonstrated in the following example offered by William Herzog:

According to Leviticus 11:38 if water is poured upon seed it becomes unclean. The passage, however, does not distinguish between seed planted in the soil and seed detached from the soil. . . . In years of poor harvests, a frequent occurrence owing to poor soil, drought, warfare, locust plagues and poor methods of farming, this text was a source of dispute. Why? During such lean years, grain was imported from Egypt. But the Egyptians irrigated their fields (putting water on seed) so that their grain was suspect, perhaps even unclean. The Sadducees judged that such grain was unclean and anyone consuming it also became unclean. They were quite willing to pay skyrocketing prices commanded by scarce domestic grain because they could afford it. . . . One senses economic advantage being sanctioned, since the Sadducees were often large landowners whose crops increased in value during such times. By contrast, the Pharisees argued that the Pentateuchal ordinance applied only to seed detached from the soil; therefore . . . one could be observant and still purchase Egyptian grain [1982:13].

The elitism of the Sadducees' position is obvious; the Pharisaic position is more ambiguous.

The Pharisees were certainly committed to making piety possible for the masses as the above example indicates, and in that sense promoted greater access to the redemptive media. But this could be—and was—seen as a strategy of courting the artisan and lower classes in order to build a regional and popular base of socio-political power over against the Jerusalem elite. And in their alternative program, the Pharisees preserved not only their privilege but their indispensability as adjudicators of the system. Their actual social solidarity with the poor was minimal, as reflected in their own observance of strict purity regulations for table fellowship. It is this reproduction of the elitist system under the guise of popular piety that Mark objects to in his negative portrayal of the Pharisees in the Gospel.

The Essenes responded in yet a third fashion. For them the solution to dilemmas of purity lay not in a lower common denominator, or in elitism, but in a withdrawal from the social mainstream in order to preserve rigorous observance. They criticized the Pharisees for what they saw as "liberalism," and the Sadducees for their self-interested classism. All three responses, however, have one crucial thing in common: the purity code itself is upheld as central. None of these strategies seemed able to prevent the code, which was originally intended to promote the social solidarity and identity of the people of God, from engendering further social stratification. Mark realized that as long as the system remained intact, the ability of persons to meet their obligations would be determined by, and thus enforce, their class standing.

The debt system was the realm of the priestly class, not only because of their role in the sacrificial cult, but perhaps more importantly because of their oversight in the collecting of tithes. I have already mentioned (above, B,ii) the economic burden of the tithe structure fell upon the food producers, and this was cause for resentment among the peasantry. They could see that many of the clergy receiving tithes were no longer really dependent upon them, as in the primitive stages of the redistributive system at the time of Moses. In fact, in many cases they were landowners, making the tithes not only gratuitous but redistributive in the wrong direction!

Serious conflicts also arose over who should control the distribution of the various tithes. Most producers could not afford the annual journey to Jerusalem to take in the tithes, so the Jerusalem clergy tried to control local distribution, often to the disadvantage of local priests and Levites (who had been disenfranchised to a great degree by the Jerusalem power base). Josephus gives accounts of this conflict in action: in two separate instances during the reign of Agrippa II he tells of the slaves of the high priest coming and forcibly removing tithes from the threshing floor. This expropriation caused poorer local priests to starve (*Ant.*, XX,viii,8; ix,2).

Oppenheimer shows how the halakic tradition (early rabbinic writings and legislation based upon Pharisaic practice) insisted on the right of the producer to determine distribution of tithes. This indicates that the Pharisees were again in conflict with central clerical control. Again, however, their program cut both ways for the peasant, for there is also halakic evidence of peasant resistance to Pharisaic attempts to enforce Sabbath regulations that prohibited sowing or harvesting on the seventh day and in the seventh year. These restrictions presented obvious hardships for the subsistence economy of the peasant, who could expect no relief from the state in hard times.

Another example was the problem of the Sabbatical release of debts. Peasants needed to obtain loans to pay their tax and tithe obligations, but:

Potential creditors were reluctant to make loans in the last few years prior to the sabbatical year. . . . This was the context and the purpose of the *prosbol* established by the Pharisaic sage Hillel, under Herod's reign. . . . Hillel designed a legal ruse by which the provisions of the law

of sabbatical release of debts could be bypassed. . . . The short-term effect of such a provision was surely relief for hungry and overtaxed peasants. The long-range effect was permanent debt [Horsley and Hanson, 1985:59f.]

The Pharisees in these ways put themselves in a position to wrest from the Jerusalem clergy some of the economic control over the rural classes.

iv. *Torah and Temple*

With the emergence of the synagogue system, Torah was increasingly central to the symbolic order. It was the domain of the scribal class, which Jeremias tells us consisted of both Pharisees and Sadducees, higher and lower clergy (1969: chap. 10). The scribes dominated the Sanhedrin, which held ultimate juridical authority in Israel. This "exclusive class of Sages enjoying special privileges by reason of their engaging in study" (of Torah) maintained considerable social power and prestige (Oppenheimer, 1977:1).

The struggle over Torah interpretation was a major source of social conflict among the social groups:

A fixed, written scripture requires interpretation. The authority to interpret was disputed by the various groups, and it is no wonder, for those who have the authority to interpret have the closest possible relation to the power of God, a position which may be and was translated into enormous political and economic power. . . . It is not surprising that the basic dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees was over authority to interpret revelation and that the Essenes also claimed such exclusive authority [Isenberg, 1973:31].

Of particular concern was the Pharisaic oral tradition, which represented a directly competing basis of ideological authority, for they claimed it to be parallel with Torah and traced its origins back to Moses. This confirms the social basis of the ongoing dispute between Sadducean "biblical conservatism" and Pharisaic tradition (see below, 7,C,ii). Meanwhile, apocalyptic movements, which felt excluded from the redemptive media altogether, fought back with "secret" revelations and esoteric interpretive schemes of scripture. It is of utmost significance that Mark affirms the Hebrew scriptures while rejecting the rest of the dominant symbolic order; in his Gospel we see him vying with scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees over the issue of hermeneutic authority.

S. Safrai (1976) argues that even though synagogues began to decentralize the symbolic system, even synagogue liturgy focused on the temple. Cult was indisputably the center of the symbolic order, as was true of every major social formation in Middle East antiquity. The Jerusalem temple had an imposing stature, both literally as a building and as the heart of the Jewish nation:

It was firmly believed that the Temple was destined to exist eternally, just like heaven and earth. . . . With the destruction of the Temple the image of the universe was rendered defective, the established framework of the nation was undermined [Safrai and Stern, 1977:906].

It was where God dwelt, and in it the whole ideological order was anchored and legitimated. It was the one holy place universal to all Jews, toward which all pilgrimages and contributions were directed. Politically the temple served as a constant reminder of the tradition of Davidic kingship and an independent Israel, for which reason it naturally lay at the heart of dreams of liberation from Rome.

J. Lundquist has shown how temple construction and maintenance was quintessential to the process of "state formation" in the ancient Near East:

Only with the completion of the temple in Jerusalem is the process of imperial state formation completed, making Israel in the fullest sense "like the other nations." The ideology of kingship in the archaic state is indelibly and incontrovertibly connected with the temple building and with temple ideology [1982:272].

He then notes the four elements of the "primordial landscape" that are "reproduced architecturally and ritually in ancient Near Eastern temple traditions": (1) the cosmic mountain; (2) the primordial hillock that first emerged from the waters of creation; (3) the spring waters of life, symbolizing both chaos and salvation; (4) the tree of life (ibid.: 274). These aspects of symbolic discourse in Oriental antiquity were appropriated by Israel, and will be directly relevant to our reading of Mark (below, 10,C). Finally, Lundquist confirms that the Jerusalem temple stood as the center of the Israelite symbolic order, and thus eventually the spatial and geographical heart of the nation as well (ibid.: 284ff.).

Economically the temple dominated Jerusalem, and to a lesser extent all of Judea. Though originally intended as the "central storehouse" of the redistributive economy, it had come to represent massive capital accumulation:

From the tithes and other dues to the priesthood and temple, through repayment and interest on loans, and even through the contributions which Diaspora Jews from around the world sent to the Temple, surplus wealth flowed into, and piled up in, Jerusalem. There were no mechanisms, however, by which these resources could be channeled to the people most in need. . . . Rather, some of the surplus wealth was used on luxury goods or simply stored in the temple treasury, in the form of valuable metals or objects [Horsley and Hanson, 1985:61].

Temple trade undergirded the thriving commercial sphere in Jerusalem, and provided both revenue for and contributions to the welfare of the city. Its

maintenance and renovation generated countless jobs upon which the urban population depended (Theissen, 1976).

Needless to say, as the primary domain of the native ruling and high priestly castes, the temple was the theater of constant political posturing. It is not hard to see why the first act of revolutionary defiance in 66 C.E. was the suspension of the daily sacrifices on behalf of Rome; why the rebel factions competed for control over the temple during the provisional government; and why the last part of Jerusalem to fall to the Roman siege in 70 was the temple mount. Obviously, every Jewish social group and strategy had to take an ideological stance in relation to the temple. The Essenes, who otherwise wholly rejected the authority of the Jerusalem clergy and its social order, remained committed to the eschatological purification of the temple. However much rebel groups may have been motivated by a desire to overthrow the temple aristocracy, there is no evidence that they fundamentally questioned the legitimacy of the temple-state itself.

But for Mark, the temple state and its political economy represented the heart of what was *wrong* with the dominant system. He had no wish for greater access to, or control over, the cultus—only its demise. In the same breath, he was at pains to reassure his Palestinian readers that God's existence was not tied to the temple.

2F. IDEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL STRATEGIES

The final task of this portrait is to indicate the strategies of the main social groups within the Palestinian formation of this era. B. Holzner writes:

Any dominant ideology, especially one maintained defensively by a group threatened by change or by hostile forces, tends to emphasize collective identities and group boundaries. . . . In the integrated social system every segment must somehow come to terms with the dominant ideology, and its projections of collective identity [1972:157].

Of particular interest will be attitudes toward the colonial arrangement that simultaneously demanded "membership" in the Roman empire and "membership" in the house of Israel. I will first look at the groups that accommodated and collaborated with the dominant order (legitimizing strategies). Then, drawing upon Holzner's three types of subversive strategies (escapist, loyalistically radical, and confrontative/alienative), I will mention attempts to reform or resist that order.

i. Colonialism and Collaboration

The ideological strategy of Roman colonialism at the time of the high empire, according to a concise study by J. Fears, was "a notably successful attempt to bring a large number of different ethnic groups and their political

units under a single government," accomplished largely through a "network of personal alliances with the ruling classes throughout the empire" (1980:98f.). Roman propaganda promoted the divine vocation of Rome to rule the world in peace, backed by military might, guaranteeing its citizens freedom:

The ideological justification for empire rested firmly and unabashedly on a political theology of victory, or what we might call a clear sense of Manifest Destiny. . . . The Roman Republic and its empire thus rested upon ideological foundations similar to those twin pillars of the modern nation-state: democracy and nationalism [ibid.:99,101]

By the first century C.E., however, the original republican mythology of pre-Caesarian Rome had fully succumbed to the cult of the charismatic autocrat, the emperor. I recommend to the reader Klaus Wengst's recent study of the ideological legitimation of the "Pax Romana" for the best summary analysis of the military, political, economic, legal, and cultural dimensions of imperial Rome (1987:7ff.). He correctly argues that we cannot understand what I am calling the war of myths in the New Testament without an appreciation of the rhetoric of Roman apologists and propagandists, and the brutal realities they masked.

The imperial cult was the most important ideological vehicle in the provinces:

Official Roman imperial propaganda was a highly sophisticated political tool. Public festivals of all sorts, local celebrations, religious feasts, and most particularly, imperial anniversaries and other imperial occasions provided a number of opportunities in each year for public ovations, proclamations, and pageants celebrating the virtues of the Emperor [Fears, 1980:102].

Because the emperor cultus could not formally operate in Jewish Palestine, Jewish feasts at times to affirm loyalty to Rome became all the more crucial. This helps explain why, as relationships between the Jewish state and the Roman colonizers grew increasingly strained, the annual high holy days were almost always occasions of political tension and potential violence.

Rome's strategy of allowing limited internal autonomy was based upon, as in so many neocolonial formations today, the cooperation of the native aristocracy. After the demise of the Hasmoneans, the Herodian royalty and the high priestly aristocracy depended utterly upon Rome's good favor for political survival. Indeed, "the high priestly families which Herod brought in and which monopolized the chief priestly offices right up to the Jewish revolt were, some of them, not even Palestinian Jewish families, but powerful families from the Diaspora" (Horsley and Hanson, 1985:62).

The ideological strategy of the ruling classes reflected their realism. On the one hand they were well aware of the power of Jewish nostalgia for the bygone

days of the independent Hasmonean state, and were ever fearful of eruptions of Maccabean sentiment. They endeavored to appease nationalist sentiment by winning small concessions from Rome, and paid lip service to eschatological eulogies of Davidic rule. On the other hand the aristocracy appreciated the fact that the days of Israel's independence were over forever. They made every effort to assure the procurators that they could and would control their own people, knowing that the necessity of Roman intervention would mean further circumscription of their facade of power.

Thus, the collaborative ruling class promoted an ideological synthesis of "cooperative nationalism" in order to satisfy both patriotic longing and imperial overlords. This strategy was typified in many ways by the half-Jew Herod the Great; though he was responsible for the magnificent reconstruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, "yet it was typical of him that he placed a golden eagle, symbol of the Roman Empire, above the entrance gate" (Rhoads, 1976:25).

But attempts at walking a middle road between Hellenism and Judaism often backfired, as in this case: the eagle was torn down by patriotic Pharisees. Despite the many internecine conflicts among the Jewish elite, Rome recognized that those Jews had a common interest in maintaining stability; consequently their curious theological squabbles were of little concern to the procurators. Overall, the servility of the ruling factions became a powerful ideological asset to Rome, the basis for their political rationalization of the colonial status quo.

At the same time, Rome was vigilant against any and all forms of resistance, and the sight of captured insurgents being crucified was not uncommon throughout Palestine. Any Jewish dissident group that did not accept its fundamental subservience—however seemingly bizarre or harmless its alternative symbolic claims may have seemed to the Latin mind, as with the sign prophet movements—was brutally suppressed by Rome. This served as a sober reminder of the limits of imperial benevolence, and it was not lost upon the Jewish ruling classes. As polarization increased in the early 60s, and the strategy of accommodation became increasingly bankrupt in its tolerance of blatant Roman corruption and provocation, it was still the fear of Roman retaliation that made the elites the last to join, and the first to defect from, the revolt.

ii. *Renewal Movements: Reform and Withdrawal*

It is fair to say that among the literate Jewish elite of the era, there were two concerted reform movements: the Essenes and Pharisees. The latter first gained notoriety for their resistance to the oppressive policies of the Hasmonean dynasty, and later to Herod as well. It has been difficult for scholars to gain an accurate picture of the Pharisees of the first century. Modern Jewish scholars have rightly disputed the biased and almost wholly negative portrait of the Pharisees in the Christian Gospels, and hence traditional Christian interpretation. Yet these efforts have themselves been polemically apologetic, as S.

Sandmel points out, for "Judaism is in a sense a lineal descendant of Pharisaism" (1978:158).

Three things can be said with reasonable certainty. First, Pharisaism was a vigorous challenge to the elitist clerical classes that made attempts to be populist. Their strategy was not disinterested, however, but rather an effort to build an alternative political base. Their oral tradition was an elaborate legitimating ideology for this project. The triumph of the synagogue Judaism of the rabbis after the fall of the temple in 70 C.E. is testimony to the success of this strategy. Secondly, theirs was clearly a reformist strategy; they worked to extend the redemptive media of the dominant ideological order, not overturn them. Thirdly, the movement was diverse, and we find criticism of Pharisaic hypocrisy in the rabbinic tradition as well as the Gospels. J. Wilde, following Bowker, believes that it was only one strict wing of the Pharisees, the *perushim* table fellowship sect, that Mark attacks in the Gospel (1974:196ff.).

The attitude of the Pharisees toward the revolt is difficult to assess. They were certainly no strangers to political coalitions; a century earlier they had aligned themselves with the Romans against the excesses of the Hasmonean dynasty, and several Pharisees were executed by Herod for subversion. There is little doubt that many joined the insurrection, yet because their social power was not Jerusalem-based, the Pharisees survived the collapse of the revolt. As we will see, Mark's narrative reflects a particular concern to delegitimize the Pharisees, who no doubt were strong ideological competitors.

The renewal strategy of the Essenes falls somewhere between reformism and what Holzner calls escapism, in which a group resolves its conflicts with the dominant order through disengagement. Ideologies of withdrawal tend to focus first upon justifying the group's deviant behavior, and only secondarily upon criticism of the prevailing ethos; it reflects "no ostensible desire to change the existing social order" (Carlton, 1977:35). This stance characterized many of the mystery cults and secret philosophical guilds in Hellenism, as well as later gnosticism. Movements that were politically resigned but personally renovative proliferated throughout the empire in this era, from astrology to stoicism—not unlike many forms of religiosity in the West today.

The monastic vision of the Essenes criticized both Jewish collaborators and Roman colonialists, but did not include any real strategy of engagement. It is true, as has been argued, that the Qumran documents reflect certain elements that might be considered indicative of an alternative socio-political program, such as the communalism they lived as a conscious rejection of class distinctions in Israel (Flusser, 1973). But, like their activist rebel counterparts, their ideology called for purging—not overthrowing—the dominant symbolic order. Unlike the rebels, however, their militance appears to have been restricted to literary polemics such as their apocalyptic war scrolls.

iii. *Loyalistic Radicalism: The Fourth Philosophy*

Holzner labels his second subversive strategy "loyalistically radical," which seeks structural change for the purpose of restoring or purifying traditional

values. As already pointed out (above, A,iii), we must remember that our concept of "revolution," assuming as it does the modern ideology of historical progress, does not really characterize antiquity. Insofar as we can speak of a classic "philosophy of history," it was based upon the concept of *stasis* in which minimal change was considered optimal. It was believed that time brought only deterioration, and the "Golden Age" was a past, not future, ideal: thus ideologies of "social change" were concerned with:

The restoration of certain revitalized or resuscitated versions of a traditional or conservative system. Viewed in this way, the reactionary ideology is particularly characteristic of complex pre-industrial societies whose orientations were, by definition, archaic . . . retrospective rather than prospective [Carlton, 1977:45].

As Carney puts it, "political thinkers in antiquity, all of them members of their society's elite and schooled in its backward looking Great Tradition, proved incapable of changing their terms of reference" (1975:119).

This must be applied to advocates of the "fourth philosophy" and the other forces behind the Jewish revolt: they were essentially restorationist and retrogressive. We can be grateful that revisionist histories have emphasized the social and economic criticism implied by many aspects of the rebel program. As suggested above, the revolt was as much a reflection of class tensions as of anti-imperialist sentiment, and differences between moderates and radicals in the provisional government were largely based on class distinctions:

The Zealot party was composed of dissident peasants from Judea and lower priests in Jerusalem who had been oppressed by the chief priests in the decade before the war. The early followers of Simon bar Giora were slaves and brigands who plundered the rich. Even the Idumeans who came to Jerusalem showed their distrust of the high priestly aristocracy by their readiness to support the Zealots. And the vengeance with which both the Zealots and the Idumeans treated the Jewish aristocracy can best be understood as the expression of accumulated frustration resulting from grievances against the wealthy and traditional authorities [Rhoads, 1976:178].

This does not mean, however, that we are free to understand the revolt as prototypical of modern proletarian insurrection.

In fact the aims of the rebels were relatively generic to other elite-directed movements of opposition to Hellenism in the first century. In a landmark but neglected study entitled *The King Is Dead* (1961), S. Eddy analyzed Hellenistic resistance literature from the time of Alexander to Herod, discovering that otherwise diverse movements shared three common ideological characteristics:

1. the reassertion of lost native kingships;
2. socio-economic discontent resulting from the supplanting of local aristocrats by Hellenistic colonialists;

3. the desire to regain local political control in order to preserve indigenous laws, social customs, and cultic life.

It is not hard to see each of these elements in the Jewish revolt. To whatever degree either apocalypticism or messianism shaped the political hopes of the insurgents, there is no evidence that the vision of a "liberated" future was not fundamentally restorationist.

Despite Horsley's contentions to the contrary (1987:54ff.), as far as I can see even the most radical Zealot faction never proposed more than supplanting the collaborationist priestly leadership, which had become thoroughly domesticated under the Romans, with a patriotic one. There is little indication of a rebel program for a systematic restructuring of wealth or power. Thus from Mark's perspective of the Galilean poor, the revolt promised no structural relief from a political economy of elitism.

iv. Alienated, Confrontative, Nonaligned: A Hypothesis

The third, and for purposes of reading Mark most important, strand of Holznier's trajectory of subversive social strategies is what he calls the "alienative/confrontative" stance. Immediately, however, we run into the bias of mainline modern historical sociology, which from Ernst Troeltsch to the present has almost without exception offered only pejorative caricatures of "sectarian" ideology. The problem has been correctly diagnosed as a hermeneutic one by S. Budd in her review of B. Wilson's "definitive" sociology of millennial sects: "The very alienness and separateness of the sect's cognitive world constitutes . . . the greatest pitfall on the road to a sympathetic and complete understanding of its members" by scholars (1974:156). This sociological bias has carried over into interpretations of the ideology of apocalyptic literature. Its mythic discourse is spurned as "otherworldly," its bitter social criticisms and violent imagery disdained as the vengeful rhetoric of disenfranchised social groups that have not only given up on the possibility of social reform but indeed abandoned historical "responsibility" altogether (below, 14, A, i).

According to the preconceived typologies of modern liberal sociology, an alienated group might well be critical of the dominant socio-political institutions, but if it refuses to pursue a reformist strategy, it *necessarily* becomes politically passive. It is portrayed as resolving social tensions through "introjected" or "symbolically transferred" aggression, and summarily dismissed as incidental to political culture. It seems to me that historian E. A. Judge is right in his criticism of the way in which historical sociology often is trapped in its own conceptual prisons (1980). But what if we at least posit the *possibility* of a group that is (1) radically alienated, *yet still* (2) politically engaged, *yet still* (3) nonreformist in its social strategy? I contend that the situation in Roman Palestine as portrayed above does not rule out such a possibility.

For the Galilean peasantry, the perennial burden of the imperial tribute, the social pressure of the nearby Hellenistic cities, and then the repeated experience of retribution at the hands of the Roman legions would have been more than

enough to sow deep-seated alienation. At the same time there would have been a natural class alienation from the native aristocracy, whom the peasant saw not as leader but collaborator and landlord. This double antipathy *could* have translated into solidarity with the local social bandits and subsequently the Zealots, and for many it did, but the evidence indicates that this was a minority. We know, for example, that in Galilee the organized insurrection collapsed early, and that Josephus complained bitterly of the difficulties of trying to organize rebel resistance there. The brigand leader John of Gischala appears to have been an exception in going to join in the defense of Jerusalem, and he is himself portrayed as an unscrupulous and opportunistic merchant and landowner.

Freyne believes that most rural Galileans, deeply attached to the land and therefore inherently parochial, were in fact politically ambivalent toward the revolt, but still loyal to the temple. He contends that the Pharisaic movement would have been more attractive to disaffected Galileans: an alternative to the urban ruling circles, a popularized form of piety, and most importantly a way of strengthening Jewish identity in pluralistic and pagan Galilee through an enforcement of the purity code. But Freyne's portrait is not without serious contradictions. The Pharisaic movement would not have been without its local opponents. If some Galileans were genuinely critical of the elitism of priest and landowner, they would not have been blind to the same privileges claimed by the Pharisees, nor to the conflicts regarding Sabbath restrictions upon agricultural production and the separation of tithes. Moreover, genuine Galilean commitment to the symbolic order would have generated more of a demonstrable patriotism toward the Jerusalem-based provisional government.

What if a prophet arose who advocated a strategy that disdained the collaborationist aristocracy *and* Romans equally, and who repudiated Qumranite withdrawal *and* Pharisaic activism on the grounds that neither addressed the roots of oppression in the dominant symbolic order? We know that uneducated peasants, largely unable to articulate their dissatisfactions, often looked to those able to express in popular discourse a populist vision. It is not difficult to imagine such a prophet invoking the Deuteronomic vision of a just redistributive system, and appealing to the subversive tradition of the great prophetic social critics of Israel. A pedagogy could have been developed to help the peasants unmask the oppressive economic self-interest of the Jerusalem hierarchy, their tithing structure, Sabbath regulations, and temple. There is no *a priori* reason why an alternative to the reformists and rebels could not have been proposed that addressed peasant grievances more concretely. And although it would have been remarkable, it cannot be ruled out that such a prophet might have taken the logic of solidarity among the poor so far as to challenge the artificial gulf that kept the oppressed Jew and gentile segregated.

There was ample social, economic, political, and cultural justification for a strategy that delegitimized both the Roman presence *and* the authority of the Jewish aristocracy as it was embedded in the debt and purity systems and reinforced in the temple cult and the dominant interpretation of Torah. We can

only conclude, without further evidence, that the determinate social formation of Palestine in the 60s C.E. produced conditions that render such an "alienative, confrontative and nonaligned" ideology hypothetically *plausible*. Should such an outlook manifest itself in literature we know to have come from this period, this should be accepted as concrete evidence for a unique social movement that must be evaluated on its own terms, not according to the strictures of sociological typology.

I believe Mark's Gospel to be such a document; articulating a grassroots social discourse that is at once both subversive and constructive. This document was probably written during the Roman reoccupation of Galilee between the first and second Roman sieges of Jerusalem (see below, 11,A,ii). The immediate and specific issue occasioning the Gospel was the challenge of rebel recruiters in Galilee, who were trying to drum up support for the resistance around Palestine, and no doubt demanding that Mark's community "choose sides." Though sympathetic to the socio-economic and political grievances of the rebels, Mark was compelled to repudiate their call to a defense of Jerusalem. This was because, according to his understanding of the teaching and practice of a Nazarene prophet, executed by Rome some thirty-five years earlier, the means (military) and ends (restorationist) of the "liberation" struggle were fundamentally counterrevolutionary.

It is time therefore to begin an investigation of Mark's text in order to determine the socio-historical character of his movement, which identified itself with a murdered prophet from Nazareth in Galilee, about whom the elite sources say nothing.

NOTE

1. That the New Testament writers make messianic claims concerning Jesus' Davidic sonship is not at issue here. For a helpful discussion of this question in relationship to the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, see R. Brown (1977:505ff.).