Mark’s story of Jesus reached written form as the Roman Empire was brutally reasserting its hegemony over the land of Judea. Whether we locate Mark’s achievement within the battle zones of the Levant or in Rome itself, we expect his account of Jesus to bear the scars of the tumultuous times in which it first circulated.⁴ For four brief years (66–70 CE), revolutionary groups in the East had dared to hope that the tides of Roman Empire were receding, and that some local messiah or king might re-establish the throne of David in Judea, if not Israel.⁵ Those hopes suffered successive setbacks in the factional battles within Jerusalem in the late sixties, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the siege of Masada in 73 CE, and in the crushing of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 136 CE.

The relationship of the emerging Jesus movements to these events and to the national and imperial realities motivating them is complex. I argue that the most significant oppositions in the earliest Jesus “kingdom of God” traditions focus on the Pharisees/Herodians/Sadducees—with occasional swipes at their Roman overlords—and are then recast in subtle and subversive ways as later Gospel accounts take shape in imperial contexts more distant from Judea and Galilee. That the ministry of Jesus should be seen primarily to challenge the local manifestations of power, wealth, and oppression is hardly surprising from a historical perspective. That his crucifixion under Roman law should establish his wider postcolonial credentials is perhaps less obvious at first, but something that Paul saw with blinding clarity on the road to Damascus.⁶ That Paul, preaching “Christ crucified,” should then largely forsake the “kingdom” language of Jesus and be...
seen as Apostle to the Nations, and Peter as Apostle to the Judeans/Jews, compounds our confusions over the social location and political engagements of the early Jesus followers. For these reasons we need a sensitive way of comprehending the diverse traditions and narratives caught between the worlds of Rome, Jerusalem, and Nazareth.

So after commenting on the relationship between the basileia (kingdom) language of Jesus and the empire of Rome and on the postcolonial credentials of the crucified Christ, I will evaluate anti-imperial and postcolonial studies on Mark in relation to some of Mark’s stories of Jesus. I support those postcolonial readings that move beyond binary oppositions and interpret Mark as affirming that “in Christ” (“on the way” or “in the home/boat” with Jesus), religio-ethnicity, social status, and gender are no longer grounds for oppression and division (Gal 3:28). The new hybrid communities of Jesus followers variously ignore, challenge, and transform the structures of power and wealth, whether Herodian, Judean, or Imperial. As with all postcolonial engagements, ambiguities and uncertainties remain.

**Empire of God**

The reinterpretation of the New Testament within its wider Roman imperial context has been an area of intense interest and activity over the last two decades. Warren Carter has exhorted us to be aware that “(e)ven when the New Testament texts seem to be silent about Rome’s empire, it is, nevertheless, ever present.” For some years now I have been encouraging my students to translate *he basileia tou theou* as “the empire of God” rather than “the kingdom of God” in order to evoke the political realities of the empire of Rome as they read the Gospels. I still think there is something to be said in support of this approach. The opening gambit of Jesus in Mark: “Change direction, the empire of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15), clearly does have immediate political and social consequences that have had profound implications throughout the centuries. But a closer examination of the evidence suggests that the translation issues are more complex than I had thought, and perhaps also than have been represented by those who have been advocating the primary significance of the Roman imperial context for interpreting New Testament texts.

In his investigation into anti-imperialism in the Gospels of Matthew and John, Carter argues that the latter Gospel is a “hidden transcript,” part of a debate among Jesus-believers over imperial negotiation, yet contestive of imperial power, whose rhetoric of
distance tries to create lines between the empire and the faithful followers of Jesus, urging Jesus-believers to a less-accommodated and to a more-distinctive way of life as an anti-society or alternative community.  

Part of his supporting logic for drawing lines between the kingdom of God and imperial Rome in the two Gospels is his assertion that the Greek term for "king" (basileus) was used "for various Gentile kings, including the Roman king or emperor." This is occasionally true—though it is the exception rather than the rule—and even less true of the use of basileia (kingdom). Yet Stephen Moore makes the explicit claim that "in any Roman province, the primary referent of basileia would have been the imperium Romanum" and adds that this would have been true "even in the Jewish homeland and Diaspora, presumably." Textual support for these claims is very elusive. Carter cites the evidence of Josephus using basileus to refer to "the emperors in general...the Flavian line of Vespasian and his sons...and to Titus ‘under God’s care’" as well as citing biblical texts referring to Rome and earlier "empires." On this basis he asserts that the "very language of ‘empire’ or ‘reign’ or ‘kingdom’ (basileia) underlines how great a threat the assertion of God’s empire poses to empires like Rome’s." I am very sympathetic to the work of Carter, Horsley, Moore, and others to clarify the Roman political context and its implications for interpreting the New Testament texts, but the semantic slippage occurring between the Greek basileus and basileia, and the Latin imperium, has resulted in a binary opposition between the two "empires" that diminishes the subtlety of the Gospel narratives, and the effectiveness of their critique of enslaving powers. These terms, their first-century usage and their translation, need careful re-evaluation, the results of which lead us in the direction of a postcolonial paradigm for interpreting the evidence, as I shall argue below. The bifocal juxtaposition of the Roman imperium and the empire of God requires re-viewing through the prism (if not the kaleidoscope) of the postcolonial Jesus if it is to describe truly and engage meaningfully the complexities of empire then, and now.

Despite Carter’s and Moore’s assertions above, there are very few instances in the Greek texts or inscriptions of the first century (including the Biblical texts and Josephus) where basileia has been used explicitly to refer to Rome and its empire. Occasionally, basileus is used of a Roman ruler or of kings in general including Romans (Lk 17:7; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16), but it is used in the Gospels primarily to refer to Herod and his successors, and elsewhere to other client kings who ruled with Rome’s permission. Kaisar and hegemone
are used consistently in first-century texts to describe the overarching dominance of Rome and its Caesars. On one level, this should come as no surprise—the Roman Republic was fiercely antimonarchical in ethos and at least initially a reluctant participant in overseas wars (see 1 Macc 8, especially 8:14)—though by the first century the embodiment of its imperium in a Kaisar was well established and affirmed (usually) by the Roman Senate. The consequence of this is that we cannot escape the implication that the initial focus of any critique implied in the phrase “the basileia of God” in the context of the historical Jesus is the basileia of Herod and his successors, not Rome as such. There are references to Rome and its hegemony in Mark’s account, but the immediate context for the new social imaginary of Jesus is the extraordinary reign of Herod the Idumean and his successors—the megalomaniac and paranoid architect of one of the greatest building programs in the first-century circum-mediterranean world—and not explicitly his Roman overlords.

The use of basileia, Kaisar, autokrator, and hegemone in Josephus is in general consistent with this basic understanding that the nature and nomenclature of Roman rule was different to the kingdoms of the East and required the use of different terminology, even after some Caesars began to claim the divine rights and powers more common to Eastern rulers. The occasional lapses where Josephus use basileis for a Roman ruler suggest that he saw them as equivalent terminology rather than being fully aware of the Roman republican ethos and their aversion to kingly language. The overwhelming tendency is for the Roman ruler to be called the Kaisar or autokrator and for his rule to be described using terms like hegemone, and never basileia.

It is possible to cite references from Josephus and biblical texts where basileia is used of the earlier Eastern “empires” (from Assyrians and Babylonians to Alexander the Great), but to call them “empires” (Latin imperium) is strictly anachronistic and so these instances cannot be cited as evidence that basileia was understood to mean “empire” at that time. We may judge today that the rule of these mega kingdoms is of a similar scale to the later Roman imperium, and so call them “empires,” but to establish that imperium and basileia were used widely of the same reality in the first century, as Carter, Moore, and others have claimed, we need to demonstrate that they were regularly used interchangeably at that time. Judge untangles the complexities surrounding these issues with characteristic clarity:

It is a productive historical exercise to use only the terminology of the times, and thus speak of the “Caesars,” “Augustuses” (this plural was
common in both Latin and Greek), "commanders" or "leaders," abandonning altogether the intrusive terminology of monarchy or empire, along with all their unhistorical trappings of reign, succession, throne, crown and palace. 19

The dominance of the Greek language eventually prevails and the Caesars "become" basileis, even as Latin begins to take over as the lingua franca of the ancient world. Judge described how from the second century the influence of classicism and the ideals of Hellenistic kingship lead to the basileia word group being used more frequently of Rome, and even by Romans, until it becomes commonplace in the writings of Eusebius. 20 Linguistically (and historically?), it is not so much that the basileia tou theou redefines and becomes (converts?) the imperium, as the imperium redefines and becomes the basileia, and particularly so in the ecclesiastical writings of the third century and later.

This later development should not be permitted to blur the meaning and careful use of basileia in first-century texts in order to heighten the opposition between kingdom of God and the empire of Rome, or between the kingship of Christ and the emperor of Rome, as a primary hermeneutical paradigm for interpreting the early New Testament documents. Elements of a vigorous anti-imperialism remain in New Testament texts but the binary opposition between the kingdom of God and the imperium Romanum is a peculiarly modernist pursuit that reinscribes the very notion and parameters of empire that the Gospel of Jesus confronts and transforms. It may be argued (as does Josephus in Antiq. 8.155-7) that functionally, basileus/Kaisar/pharaoh/king mean the same thing in different languages, and in a general sense—by analogy, or by using less specific categories such as "authorities," "rulers," "powers" (as in Romans 8 and 13)—this is true. But in a specific text or context we are not at liberty to equate basileus with Kaisar or basileia with imperium unless we can demonstrate that the terms are used interchangeably within that text or tradition, and we have shown that this is almost never the case in the first century.

Postcolonial Jesus

A similar semantic problem arises with the juxtaposition of the imperial language of the Caesar cults and the Christological language of the New Testament. Such comparisons are highly relevant, and much valuable work has been done in collecting not just the textual
evidence but the numismatic and archaeological evidence that is helpful for “thickening” our description of the visual, cultural, and textual dimensions of the first-century world within which we interpret New Testament texts. But a distortion emerges when we construct binary oppositions between Christ and the Emperor (Who is the real Son of God/Savior?) and thereby overplay the polemical nature of the Christological claims of the Gospels, Paul’s letters, and the Book of Revelation. There is great hermeneutical value in recognizing the political dimensions of these Christological claims—then and now—but we need to read them in the context of the many Lords, Gods, and Saviors of that time, and not just as a showdown at high noon between one JC and the successors of another.\(^{21}\) That: the crucified JC from Nazareth should still be spoken of in divine terms, whereas the imperial JC divinized by the Roman Senate is not any more, is an extraordinary historical development, but it should not be read back into the first century, nor permitted to glamorize the obscure origins of the Jesus movement. The Romans were a very tolerant people and legalized the worship of many gods and their offspring throughout their empire. The claims of the followers of Jesus took decades to reach official scrutiny—and centuries to achieve legality—yet were not so unusual in themselves, except insofar as they attached to a crucified person and that they were related in complex and confusing ways to the legitimate religio of the “Jewish” people. Note here that it is not any sense of the “uniqueness” of Jesus’ trial, suffering, and death by crucifixion that qualified him as a focus for renewal and inspiration, but the very commonality of his experience that resonated for thousands of others at that time—and God was with him, and therefore with others suffering similar prospects also. Such convictions energized alternative values to the imperium of Rome and enabled the emergence of social imaginaries that were not bound by the constraints of patriarchy and patronage.

Whatever we might make of the origins of the sayings of Jesus critical of, or dismissive of, Caesar and his empire, something in the words, deeds, and life of Jesus of Nazareth laid the foundation for a “postcolonial” response among his followers to the scandal of his crucifixion under Roman authority.\(^{22}\) Whether that death was primarily due to Judean politics or imperial expediency matters less than the way that the crucifixion of Jesus came to relativize the ultimate power of Rome for the ekklesiai of God. The empire and its agents could do their worst and still the power of the spirit of Christ would continue to bring about social transformation within the communities of followers. Any persecution suffered by those living the Way of Jesus served
to authenticate the leadership and growth of the ekklesiai rather than curtailing it, but persecution came not only at the hands of Rome: "As for yourselves, look out; for they will hand you over to councils (synedria); and you will be beaten in synagogues (synagogas); and you will stand before governors (hegemons) and kings (basileus) because of me, as a witness to/against them" (Mk 13:9).

What Carter calls "imperial negotiation" describes an important part of this gradual process whereby the followers of Jesus found their "space" and "orientation" (topos and telos) in the wider Roman Empire. The question we must ask is whether the foregrounding of the imperium throughout the interpretation of each gospel does justice to

1. the more localized context of the earliest Jesus traditions underlying the gospel accounts;
2. the creativity and diversity of the responses to empire, kings, governors, and councils by different groups of Jesus followers;
3. the disregard for empire and its agents and the deliberate avoidance of imperial and royal symbols evident in some texts; and
4. the openness of the postcolonial Jesus (the crucified Christ) to all nations, all victims, and all oppressors who stand at the foot of the cross, and the transformative nature of this radical openness for the understanding and critique of empire and those "who think they rule over the nations, lording it over them" (Mk 10:42).

To persist with an anti-imperial paradigm for interpreting the Jesus traditions is to run the risk of replacing transformation with reversal, such that the polarities remain and the kingdom of God becomes the new patriarchal empire of Rome.

The storyweaving metaphor illustrates the postcolonial approach beautifully: a basic loom needs two beams to support the warp (vertical strings/ends) so that the horizontal weft can be threaded between them. But the real meaning and magic takes place in-between the defined top and bottom (in the interstitial dialogue between the binary opposites)—and particularly where the weaver dares to subvert the horizontal and vertical grids to make other patterns. Three points are important:

I. The defined polarities are essential to clarify the interstice within which the weaving/storytelling may proceed (we need to hear the hard truths from all sides—so Marxist and Liberationist approaches still have their place);
2. The most satisfactory results come from weavers who defy the strictures of the grid and dare to make other patterns not defined by horizontal or vertical lines of power—and particularly when distinctive cultural identities and visions are realized in the process; and

3. All weaving starts at the bottom and builds toward the top—and so must storytelling, Biblical exegesis, and hermeneutics. The voices of the Indigenous, the colonized; the subalterns, and the oppressed must be heard if we are to be true to the canonical privileging of the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the Gentile, and/or the Jew (whichever is in the minority or excluded), the leper, the blind, the woman blamed for adultery, the tax-collector, and so on.

In the postcolonial interpretation of Mark’s Gospel, some argued that Mark functions as a narrative that defines the top and bottom of the loom, even as it mimics and strives to reverse the tables on the imperial powers through the coming empire of Jesus. I support more recent postcolonial commentators who read Mark as providing a richer tapestry of engagement with the various powers—a narrative weaving that empowers those who follow the way of Jesus to confront, sometimes ignore, and to subvert the oppressive hegemonies of those “who seem to rule” or “who think they rule.”

**Postapocalyptic Mark**

To undertake a postcolonial analysis of Mark in a convoluted context of multiple polarities is to leave open the spaces between various oppressors and those they ruled. The earlier liberationist approaches involving comprehensive polarities between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, empire and subalterns, no longer suffice as frameworks within which to interpret Mark, since the interstices between the political realities in the world of Jesus and Mark were ambiguous, contested, and unstable. The term “polycolonialism”—coined by Saugata Bhaduri with reference to the complex colonial histories of India—also makes sense of the Eastern Mediterranean in the first century. The identities of, and relationships between, Gentiles and Jews; Galileans, Judeans, and Samaritans; Pharisees and Sadducees; Herodians and Romans; women, men, and eunuchs; village and city; and slaves, day workers and peasants; caution us against imposing overarching binary oppositions on the narrative. This is not an excuse to avoid addressing the evils of colonialism and oppression,
but rather grounds for insisting that we are attuned to the range of stories from those caught between the “powers that be”—beginning with those with the least power. The multiple reputed identities of Josephus amply illustrate the confused social hybridities we need to understand and address: a politician, soldier, historian, Galilean Jew, priest, Pharisee, Revolutionary Commander, Jewish apologist, Roman commentator, and so on. How should we read his voluminous testimony as an eyewitness to many tumultuous first-century events—and how then Mark’s more oblique references to some of the same events?

We glimpse some of the possibilities of the polycolonial implications for Mark’s way of telling the story of Jesus in the growing body of literature that hears the stories with the ears of the oppressed/minority/subaltern, alert to hidden transcripts, parody, and satire. The legion of drowning pigs, the anti-climactic entry into the Temple, and the farcical representation of Jesus’ trial have revealed undercurrents of subversive hope and humor when seen in this light. The results are diverse and not uniformly “anti-imperial”—though Rome is the butt of the jokes—and illustrate well that postcolonialism is an awareness of a set of issues rather than a method to be applied rigorously and in the same way to all texts. Nor is it possible to argue from these accounts, as does Liew, that Mark envisions a bipolar reversal, whereby the Kingdom of God through the parousia of Jesus defeats the Empire of Rome so that Christ takes his place at the head of the new patriarchal hierarchy. The hope that the “last becomes first and the first last” is a parody of what it means to be first and last (as the extraordinary sequence Mk 9:35; 10:31, 43–4 demonstrates) and empties social rank of its meaning, just as the kingdom of God as a mustard seed and shrub (Mk 4:31–2) parodies and redefines the great nesting trees of the Daniel (4:9–12) and Ezekiel (17:23–4) visions of universal empire.

Nor are the narratives of Mark compliant with a hermeneutic that always places the imperium Romanum in the foreground (as Carter suggests), or that interprets all accounts in terms of “imperial negotiation.” Horsley’s reading of the healing of the two women (Mk 5:24–43) illustrates the problems of such approaches, whereby a Roman context is imposed on an explicitly Jewish one (indicated by the repetition of “12 years” framing the double narrative, Mk 5:25, 42). The twin contexts of healing, or salvation (5:34), are more domestic than political, although there is clearly a political point to be made about the status of a father who is “a leader of the synagogue.” The message delivered in 5:35 is curiously ambiguous: “Your daughter is dead” seems to imply
that this is a daughter of Jesus, as claimed in the other healing story (5:34), rather than a daughter of the synagogue authority—the leader whose faith comes to its limit in the experience of death. Mk 5 as a series of encounters seems to cascade through the social layers of the imperium, then the synagogue, until it reaches a solitary individual, “a woman” who appears in the story world without a family (5:25).

We need not accept Liew’s conclusion that the twin stories of healing in Mk 5 reaffirm the subordination of women. Of course they remain unnamed and silent, as do many of the women in Mark. The stories are told in a patriarchal world (whether Roman or Jewish) and the stories must be intelligible within that world for them even to be heard.\(^\text{38}\) We need to acknowledge that the narrator moves in 5:28–29 beyond a woman’s public speech to reveal her inner motivation and the knowledge “in her body” that her own desire for healing was fulfilled. From a modern, democratic reader’s point of view, nothing less than a public transcript, and a public liberation from male saviors, will suffice. In societies characterized by brutal asymmetries of power, hidden transcripts and hybrid accommodations may be the only realistic way forward. So Jesus touches, or is touched, by both women, but instead of being rendered unclean himself, the contagious holiness of God’s realm (basileia) affirms both “daughters” and grants to all women through them a new status that radically reinterprets any misuse of the Levitical purity codes. A powerful kinship is thereby secured in secret-sacred sites, at least in the first instance, which the tides of empire cannot wash away.\(^\text{39}\)

Reading Mark through the lens of postcolonial theory, we find not the angry anticlonal rhetoric that incites revolution, but a text that finds a “third space” in the basileia ton theou, inhabiting the line between resistance and accommodation in the confidence that there is yet another sovereign justice, beyond the politics of empires, and even beyond the dreaming of democracy. As Bill Ashcroft comments in his contribution to this volume: “In a sense one could say that postcolonial discourse itself consistently inhabits this liminal space, for the polarities of imperial discourse on one hand, and national, racial or cultural essentialism on the other, are continually questioned and problematized.”

Notes

1. Brian J. Incigneri, The Gospel to the Romans. The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark’s Gospel (Leiden: Brill, 2003), reads Mark as shaped by the Flavian triumph in Rome. I also read Mark as a postapocalyptic
(postcatastrophe or after-the-end) reconstruction of Christian origins, probably emanating from Southern Syria or the Galilee in early 70s. See Keith D. Dyer, _The Prophecy on the Mount: Mark 13 and the Gathering of the New Community_ (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998) for my reasons for such a dating.

2. “King of Israel” is used consistently in the Gospels by Jews/Judeans (Mt 27:42; Mk 15:32; Jn 1:49, 12:13), whereas “King of the Jews/Judeans” is used by Gentile outsiders.

3. “Postcolonial” is used anachronistically here to suggest both a critical awareness of—and sometimes a disregard for—colonial and imperial realities.

4. In Markan studies, Ched Myers has been a prominent forerunner to this movement.


6. Stephen Moore, _Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament_ (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 9, suggests that postcolonial studies pose a “formidable ‘translation’ problem for students of ancient literature” partly because of the use of anachronistic language and categories. These problems are even greater when our hermeneutics are shaped by anti-imperial and anticolonial frameworks. If the translation choice for basileia is between (European) “kingdom” and (Roman) “empire,” then the latter is preferable—but we need to be alert to the centuries of pro- and anti-imperial and colonial rhetoric we import into such a translation, and to the blurring of Greek and Roman terminology. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza wisely prefers to leave basileia untranslated, although she partly affirms its “oppositional character” towards Rome (writing at a time when many scholars ignored the Roman context altogether), because she wishes to “use it as a tensive symbol that evokes a whole range of theological meanings and at the same time seeks to foster a critical awareness of their ambiguity.” See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “To Follow the Vision: The Jesus Movement as Basileia Movement,” in _Liberating Eschatology_, eds. Margaret A. Foley and Serene Jones (Louisville: WJKP, 1999), 134.


9. Moore, _Empire and Apocalypse_, 38, and note 31. Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, _Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now_ (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 224, are even more emphatic: “Put
simply, basileia was how the Roman Empire presented itself in its Greek-speaking eastern half." Edwin Judge locates the earliest use of basileia as a self-reference by Romans to around 200 CE in P. Oxy. 9.1185 [cited in Edwin Judge, "We Have No King but Caesar." When was Caesar First Seen as a King?" in E. A. Judge The First Christians in the Roman-World, ed. Jarlès R. Harrison (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 401, published in 2008 but first presented in 1986].

10. Warren Carter, John and Empire, 192, repeating similar claims found in more detail in Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 62. The evidence cited in this earlier text includes biblical and extra-biblical references (using the basileia word group) to the "empires" of Alexander, the Persians, the Babylonians and the Assyrians. The book of Revelation uses basileia ("seven kings," "king of kings," and so on—never explicitly Kaisar or autokrator), yet never directly mentions Rome, thus remaining one long "hidden transcript" utilising analogy, satire, mime and theatre to challenge the diverse Kaisar cults of the Province of Asia. For the visual and cultural dimensions of this critique of Roman and civic power, see Steven J. Friesen, "Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13," JBL 123 (2004): 281–313.


12. Carter affirmed this new direction: "While oppositional binaries have been dominant in the first wave of studies, my sense is that now increasingly there is an emerging recognition of the complexities of interaction and negotiation with the empire, and more sophisticated analysis embracing not just opposition but various dynamics, including claims of superiority, self-protective accommodation, hybridity, reinscribing, and imitation." Carter, "Roman Imperial Power," 138–139. The problem remains, however, that these categories are defined in relation to empire, one way or another, whereas I argue that sometimes the New Testament traditions deliberately ignore empire and its infrastructure altogether.

13. I thank Jim Harrison of Sydney (and John Barclay for referring me to him) for the reminder that the argument and evidence has already been clearly laid out by Edwin Judge, "We Have No King but Caesar," who notes on page 403 that "Caesar dispenses kingdoms, like the patronal power in the modern world, on behalf of a leadership that has risen above such undeveloped forms" (as monarchies). See Thomas P. Madden, Empires of Trust: How Rome Built—and America Is Building—a New World (New York: Dutton, 2008), and then contrast the critical perspectives of Richard Horsley, Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), and Neil Elliott, The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), on some of the issues in today's world.


16. Judge, “We Have No King But Caesar,” 399, is emphatic: “The Latin term *rex* was never accepted as a title suitable for the leaders of the Roman *res publica*, as the state continued to be called officially for the next 500 years at least. It was not until Heraclius (AD 610ff) that the Greek term *basileus* officially displaced *autokrator*, the translation of *imperator*.”

17. The references to “kings” in *J.W.* 4.596 and 5.60 are maxims about kings in general that are applied favourably by Josephus to Vespasian and Titus respectively. The references in *J.W.* 3.351 and 5.563 include the Romans. The one instance that Carter cites where Titus is referred to as “king” by Josephus (the singular *basileus, J.W.* 5.58) relates to the siege of Jerusalem nine years before he became emperor, though even then Josephus refers to Titus as Caesar seven times in the same siege narrative (5.63, 67, 94, 97, 121, 122, 128). I am grateful to John Barclay for his critical evaluation of my claims in this section—they are the better for it—and especially in suggesting a sharper distinction between the use of *basileus* and *basileia*.

18. Contra Carter’s evidence in *Matthew and Empire*, 62. I am speaking historically here (whether *basileia* has been used explicitly of the Roman Empire in first-century texts) rather than theoretically (whether we can apply anti-imperialist categories to first century texts and institutions, or draw analogies between them). See Michael G. Smith, “The Empire Theory and the Empires of History—A Review Essay,” *CSR* 39 (2010): 305–322, for a discussion of this distinction.

19. Judge, “We Have No King But Caesar,” 399–400. I capitalize *Kaisar*/*Caesar* as a family name of the Julio-Claudians, noting that many “Caesars” after Nero—the last of that line—began to claim it as a title.

20. Judge traces the increasing use of *basileus* for *Kaisar/autokrator* in third century writers such as Clement, Origen and Celsus. See “We Have No King but Caesar,” 401.

21. N. T. Wright wrestles with the same problem in “Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans,” in *A Royal Priesthood: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, ed. C. Bartholomew (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 173–193. The postcolonial insights into mimicry, catachresis, and hybridity assist in reframing these tensions so that (anti)imperialism does not define the debate, nor provide the only terminology that can be used.
22. "Postcolonial" is used here in the sense described by Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 5, as "less suggestive of chronological or ideological supersession" but sensitive to "the complex relations of domination and submission, dependence and independence, resistance and collusion that typically characterize the exchanges between colonizer and colonized not only during colonial occupation but also after official decolonization."


24. Note the lack of reference in Mark to the Herodian capitals of the Galilee (Sepphoris—an hour’s walk from Nazareth—and Tiberias), or to the location of the Baptist’s demise (the Herodian fortress of Machaerus), or even (almost) to Jericho (winter playground of the elite; Mk 10:46). The narrative chooses to focus on the blind beggar beside the road rather than the three magnificent Herodian palaces that dominated the landscape beside the Jerusalem road. The only Herodian building mentioned in Mark is the Jerusalem Temple, which Jesus left without a stone to stand on (Mk 13:2). So much for the Herodian building program.

25. This is what happened historically, as has been pointed out by Tat-siong Benny Liew and Stephen Moore. Liew (see below) believes this is so of Mark’s gospel; Moore is less sure about Mark, but makes the point that Rev 11:15 can be read both ways; such that the result is “an empire that is both Roman and Christian at one and the same time.” *Empire and Apocalypse*, 119.

26. The storyweaving and storytelling circles of the Indigenous peoples of Australia, Asia, the Pacific, and the United States embodied the postcolonial ethos—the colonizers and their descendants present were roundly critiqued, condemned, laughed at, welcomed, and even ... ignored.

27. The position of Tat-siong Benny Liew, *Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), springs to mind here. The clarity of the oppositions he describes is breath-taking, but the complexity and transformative ambiguity of the stories in-between the polarities of Mark’s narrative world is missing.

28. Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), suggests a postcolonial model he calls “strategic essentialism and transcultural hybridity,” using an awareness of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity to explore the dynamics and space between colonist and colonized, yet without forsaking the “essential” need to name the powers where appropriate. He distinguishes his model from the essentialist/nativist resistance (Horsley, Myers), resistance/recuperative (Sugirtharajah) and diasporic intercultural (Segovia) models. C. I. David Joy, *Mark and its Subalterns: A Hermeneutical Paradigm for a Postcolonial Context* (London: Equinox, 2008), extends Samuel’s approach from an Indian perspective in his use of “subaltern” as analogous to the oppressed
29. Saugata Bhaduri, “The Polycultural Context of Bengal and Its Implications for Postcolonial Theology,” a paper presented at “Story Weaving: Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theology” Conference (Whitley College, Melbourne, January 23-25, 2012). Bhaduri points out that binary oppositions result in an oversimplification of historical analysis and are in themselves a colonial construct and exercise of power. In the Indian context, this is evident in the over-emphasis on the significance of British colonialism at the expense of the Indigenous peoples and the Portugese, Dutch, French, and Danish colonies. The binary nature of anticolonial and anti-imperial rhetoric can mask as much truth as it reveals.


31. That the story of the Gerasene demoniac relates to the Roman occupying forces (even specifically the Tenth Legion, Fretensis, whose medallions carry the boar/pig symbol) has long been argued. See Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 24-29. The alternative (and later) tradition that insists on the literalness of a bizarre “miracle” and relocates it to Gergesa (where there is a steep slope by the sea and the pigs do not have to run so far) seems to have prevailed from the 6th century onwards. Matthew’s hidden transcripts in this account are even more hidden, with no reference to legion (so Carter, Matthew and Empire). See Joy, Mark and Its Subalterns, 166-178, for a vivid description of how this text creates “new frontiers” and new space for the liberation of the subalterns in Kerala.


33. See Andrew Simmonds, “Mark’s and Matthew’s Sub Rosa Message in the Scene of Pilate and the Crowd,” JBL 131 (2012): 733-754, where he argues that (in different ways) Mark and Matthew use satirical mimicry of Roman mime to “send up” Pilate and the Roman trial of Jesus, affirming instead a subversive subaltern view of reality. Simmonds argues that Mark’s trial account is a mimic parody of a Roman crowd baying for a gladiator’s blood, presided over by a “Caesar” unable to escape the dictates of mob rule.
34. As Stephen Moore describes it, postcolonial criticism “is not a method of interpretation (any more than is feminist criticism, say) so much as a critical sensibility acutely attuned to a specific range of interrelated historical and textual phenomena.” Empire and Apocalypse, 7. Of course, more explicit connections with Roman hegemony occur at Mk 10:42 (“those who think they rule”) and in the much discussed “render unto Caesar” text (Mk 12:13–17), both of which can be construed as blatantly anti-imperial...but in an ambiguous postcolonial kind of way! See also Mark Brett, Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 141–5.

35. The comments on Spivak’s use of catachresis (encouraging resistance through the deliberate “misuse” of imperial/colonial terminology) by Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 37–38, are very helpful in this context ‘if applied to the first place to the “local elites” rather than directly to Rome. God’s “kingdom” is like a lemon tree (a back-yard bush that bears fruit that begs to be shared communally, and is hardly worth nesting in), which is a subversive parody of the grander analogies involving cedars of Lebanon and other huge trees that evoke those “who think they rule over the nations,” even as it expresses the hope for some kind of transnational lemon tree.

36. Horsley, Jesus and Empire, 109, sees clearly the symbolic connection between the two twelves and Israel, but misses the gender of the two women.

37. I am deeply indebted to my colleague and editor, Dr. Mark Brett, for the skillful weaving of these last three paragraphs.

38. Liew consistently reads the patriarchal world in which Mark’s narrative is set and against which it must be interpreted as absolute and overwhelming, such that even after the reversal at the parousia of Jesus it is reinscribed. This is an interpretation of Mark dominated by polar opposites and vertical lines of power, with no room for subversive story-weaving. Apart from the problem that there is no imminent parousia in Mark as such (the term does not occur, and Mk 13 is widely interpreted with reference to the Jewish War these days—with ultimate hopes of “that day” deferred to a time not even the son knows about, Mk 13:32), Liew is impatient with the subtle glimmers of hope for women in Mark and sees them as evidence that “Mark is also guilty of trafficking women” (Politics of Parousia, 144), such that the hemorrhaging woman—adopted as “daughter” and told to “go in peace” is “once again placed under the direction of a man” who acts as “spokesman, provider, and protector” (139). For Liew, not only does “Jesus’ redefinition of his family not free women from obligations of home and family, it also ‘does not deliver them from male domination’ (139). It seems that sensitivity to contemporary issues is here overruling sensitivity to the world of the text, and a propensity for polarization overwhelming the possibilities for transformation.
39. In such a context, the suggested neologism “kindom of God” [kindom vs. kingdom] for basileia tou theou (read this carefully—for those “who have eyes to see”), from Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz in En la lucha (In the Struggle): Elaborating a Mujerista Theology, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) provides a dash of weft to subvert customary power grids. (Reference in Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 120 n41).
Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies
Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific

Edited by
Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea
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