the basis of the Matthean "if you wish to be perfect" (19:21), the Catholic tradition has regarded the vow of poverty within the monastic and religious life as an "evangelical counsel," creating a two-tiered response to Jesus: the "perfect" and the rest. The edge has been taken off the radical nature of Jesus’ call. The Protestant tradition tightly rejected the vowed life as a superior vocation within the universal call to holiness. But it tended to adopt what Ulrich Luz describes as "Protestant middle-class domesticity." Christian life within a financially secure and relatively comfortable social situation tends to regard this word of Jesus as hardly relevant. We have "thrown out the baby with the bathwater." Mark 10:17–22 does not direct all seeking discipleship to divest themselves of their possessions. Wealth and possessions were this man’s problem. They stood between him and an unconditional self-gift to following the way of Jesus. This is the universal message that comes from Jesus’ encounter with the rich man. In God’s established order, wealth and possessions have their place, but they regularly obstruct a Christian’s unconditional acceptance of the word and person of Jesus. Ulrich Luz insists that we need to take this problem seriously: "It is my opinion that any concrete suggestion that does not lead to changes in both personal and ecclesiastical finances simply ignores the text. . . . Any present understanding of a biblical text must include practical application—that, in other words, a mere verbal, abstract understanding that excludes one’s existence from the claims of the text is no genuine understanding." 10

Across Mark 9:31–50, Jesus instructs failing disciples (9:32–34) on receptivity and service (vv. 35–50). Mark 10:1–31 tells the same bell. But in this literary centerpiece of the Markan journey to Jerusalem (8:22–10:52), Jesus not only teaches principles. He points to God’s right order in the lived reality of marriage and wealth. Jesus will shortly indicate that he asks them to follow a Son of Man who serves and lays down his life (10:45). Jesus’ story challenges Christians to a reversal of the absolutes of "this world." The Christian reception of Mark 10:1–31 indicates that this "word of God" remains "living and active, a two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Notes

1. The development of a more juridically structured Western church owes much to the reforms of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), during a period of intense conflict between secular and religious authority. The authority of the pope over the secular princes was dramatically acted out in the submission of Henry VII (Holy Roman Emperor) to Gregory VII at Canossa in 1077. For a summary of this period and its effects on the Catholic Church’s self-understanding, see Francis J. Moloney, Reading the New Testament in the Church: A Primer for Pastors, Religious Educators, and Believers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 5–7. For a stimulating reflection on the role of Gregory VII in European and Catholic history, see Eamon Duffy, Ten Popes who shook the World (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 59–69.


5. For a recent fully documented study of this question, see Francis J. Moloney, A Body Broken for a Broken People: Divorce, Remarriage, and the Eucharist (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 205–18.

6. The Eastern Orthodox traditions equally defend the indissolubility of what they regard as a "sacramental marriage." But they allow "separation" and subsequent remarriage in situations where the relationship has broken down completely, accompanied by a confession of sinfulness, and the imposition of an appropriate penance.


9. Ibid., 2:496.

10. As Marcus, Mark, 2:710 puts it: "Jesus and the Markan Christians are people who rejoice in the dawning light of the new age—which is also the recaptured radiance of Eden."


12. Commentators regularly point out the appropriateness of the passage from marriage (vv. 1–12) to children (vv. 13–16). See, for example, Marcus, Mark, 2:713. Collins, Mark, 471, rightly points to the close link between the children who have nothing but respond to the opportunity of entering the kingdom (vv. 13–16) and the rich man who has everything (vv. 17–31) and does not respond positively.


14. On the background to the "relatively low state of children," see Collins, Mark, 472, and the further indications there.

15. Hooker, St. Mark, 238. See also Marcus, Mark, 2:719.

16. The list given does not follow the biblical order of what is commonly called the "second table," probably determined by the context: a rich man is likely to be excluded.

17. The passage reflects the early Christian belief that, however valuable Torah was to find God’s ways, following Jesus and his teaching went further.

18. See Collins, Mark, 480.

19. Lane, Mark, 368.

20. Rather than following akeideitai mou. See v. 21), went away (apokatassao).

21. The tragic nature of this failure is shown by the narrator’s comment that the man went away "cowardly" (alaphizeinai).

22. Among many, see Lane, Mark, 369: "In Judaism it was inconceivable that riches should be a barrier to the kingdom."


26. As Marcus, *Mark*, 2:736, puts it: "the divine grace that transforms the impossible into the possible by creating a new people of God out of hopeless human material."


28. The contrast between "this time" and "the time to come" is widespread in apocalyptic thought, but this is the only place where Mark uses it. See the valuable commentary in Collins, *Mark*, 482–83.


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