

Has God Joined Them? A Study of Mark 10:1-12 and its Challenges

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Introduction

The text (10:1-12) before us is Jesus' teaching about divorce according to Markan account.¹ In this account there is a change of location and audience, though the gamut of the teachings remains the disciples as 10:10-12 portrays. The text 10:2-12 as it is presented functions as a pronouncement story consisting of an introductory question by the Pharisees (10:2), a counter-question by Jesus (10:3), a response by the Pharisees (10:4), and Jesus' concluding pronouncement consisting of his response to the Pharisees (10:5-9) and his teaching on the subject to the disciples (10:10-12). The focus of the teaching, however, remains upon the disciples, as 10:10-12 reveals.

The heart of the narration focuses on the Pharisaic search for exceptions to the divinely ordained "till death do us part" intention of marriage (10:6-9) and the concession God permits in the OT (10:3-4) due to human sinfulness (10:5). True discipleship, Jesus insists, is not to be lived out in light of concessions given due to fallen nature of humanity but in light of the ultimate divine intention. Therefore divorce is excluded and remarriage after divorce becomes adultery (10:10-12).

Therefore, 10:10-12 is understood by Mark (and Jesus as the absolute revealer and interpreter of God's Word) not as contradicting the Law (cf. Deut 24:1) but as revealing its true purpose.² The evangelist presents this pericope at the heart of his narration to explicate what it means to follow Jesus in the area of marriage. For those who are thinking of following Jesus (8:34), Mark stresses the future implications of this with respect to marriage. This emphasis necessary in Mark's day is even more necessary in our own time when the Institution of Marriage is being threatened by what Pope Benedict XVI called the "dictatorship of individualism" and what Pope Francis recently called "le peur du définitive". For those who seek to follow Jesus, divorce is not an option. Part of taking up the cross and following Jesus (8:34) involves maintaining the divine purpose of marriage with one person until death. The calling of the synod by Pope Francis which is going to take place this year with the theme: "The pastoral Challenges of the Family in the context of Evangelization" necessities both the choice of the central theme by CABAN members and the choice of my text under discussion. Our text insists on monogamy as an accepted marriage form by the Creator. Hence divorce and remarriage become a violation to the purpose of the Creator. But this has not prevented the existence and contracting of polygamous marriages including divorce and remarriage among the African Christians. This fact illustrates the pressure faced by many African Christians in mediating between the demands of the newly found faith and the demands of their cultural heritages in matters pertaining to marriage.

Our aim is to do a critical study of the above text and see how it can help to confirm and consolidate the faith of many married couples whose marriage is facing a lot of difficult challenges. Our approach in this study is narrative.

¹ Matthew equally has similar narration 19:1-12.

² Cf. M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (BNTC; London: Black, 1991) 235.

1. A Study of Mark 10:1-12

1.1. Structure of the Pericopé

1.1.1. Geography of the Journey (Mark 10:1)

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1.1.5 A teaching on the Subject to the Disciples (Mark 10:10-12)

1.1.1. Geography of the journey (Mark 10:1)

Jesus' "rising up" (*anastas*) recalls his "sitting down" (*kathisas*) in 9:35, and "from there" (*ekeithen*) refers to leaving "Capernaum" named in 9:33.³ The present historical tense (he comes), stresses his entrance "into the borders of Judea and Transjordan",⁴ probably as the beginning of the fulfillment of his predictions that he will undergo his passion at the hands of Jewish authorities, close to whom this move now brings him (8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

The route described is from Galilee toward Judea (and ultimately Jerusalem) through the eastern side ("across") of the Jordan River. It was common for devout Jews traveling from Galilee to Judea/Jerusalem to cross the Jordan River and proceed south to a point opposite Jericho, where they would cross the Jordan again. In doing so they would avoid traveling through Samaria.

The problem regarding the geography of Jesus' journey is reflected in three major variants in the manuscripts: 1) "the regions of Judean [and] beyond the Jordan"; 2) "the regions of Judean beyond the Jordan"; and 3) "the regions of Judean through beyond the Jordan". The first reading is generally accepted by textual critics and commentators, though one might expect a different order: "beyond the Jordan and into the regions of Judea". The evangelist may have chosen to place "Judea" first, however, to stress the ultimate goal of the journey.⁵

The verbs "came...gathered" are examples of Mark's frequent use of historical present construction in which present tense verbs are clearly past in meaning. The present tense makes the story more vivid. Mark emphasizes Jesus' popularity and fame by his reference to the "crowds". The plural is found only here in Mark. In the other thirty-seven instances of "crowd" in Mark, it is always singular. In Galilee Jesus had been focusing his teachings on his disciples (9,30-50), now in Judea he begins to teach publicly again. The point is emphasized by the repetition of the adverb *palin* which recalls the previous references to crowds gathering around Jesus (2:4,13; 3:9,20,32; 4:1,36; 5:21,24,30; 6:34,45; 7:14,33; 8:1; 9:14; 10:46; 12:37), and by the allusion to his "custom" and by the use of the imperfect *didasken*. In any, emphasizes fall on the hugeness of the number of people whom Jesus attracts who also may be travelling to Jerusalem for the Passover festival as Jesus is.

³ R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology to the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993) 528-529; similarly, C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Nelson, 2001) 82.

⁴ Cf. Mark 3:8 for the substantive use of *peran tou Iordanou*.

⁵ Gundry, *Mark*, 529. See also 7:31 and compare the order in 11:1, where the ultimate goal, Jerusalem, is placed first.

1.1.2 Introductory Question by the Pharisees (Mark 10:2)

“Pharisees approached him”: many manuscripts in Mark do not have this phrase, and its presence in some may be due to a harmonization with Matt 19:3. However, Jesus is now in Judea where he will frequently enter into debate with various Jewish groups (see 11:27-12:44), and the issue on the grounds for divorce was a controversial topic among Pharisaic sages. The approach of the Pharisees distinguish them from the crowds, since Jesus is already teaching the crowds, and therefore also distinguishes his remarks to the Pharisees from whatever he was teaching the crowds.

They asked whether it is “lawful” (*eksestin*) for a man to “divorce” (*apolysai*) his wife. In Matthean parallel there is an addition “for any cause” 19:3. The verb *apolysai* when used in the context of marriage is generally translated “divorce”.⁶ However, this translation may not entirely portray what befalls the woman when the husband decides to dismiss or sends her away from the household. At least according to their reading of Deut 24:1-4 the Pharisees knew very well that it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. One gets the impression that these men knew beforehand that Jesus’ position on this matter was in conflict with popular opinion and with Deut 24:1-4, and their question to Jesus was designed to demonstrate to the wider public his lack of orthodoxy.⁷ In that case they were “testing” him. But Mark does not specify the difficulty which makes the question testing. It is enough that Jesus will pass the test over the effort of the Pharisees to confound him.

The appearance of *peirazontes auton* here and in 8:11 indicates that this is probably a Markan explanatory comment. The comment shows that this was not a sincere theological question but an attempt to entrap Jesus (cf. 2:16,18,24; 7:5; 8:11; 12:13). In so doing, they were carrying out the work of Satan (1:12-13). It may very well be that behind this question lay a dangerous political issue.⁸ John the Baptist had been put to death by Herod Antipas for criticizing his marriage to Herodias, who had divorced her husband to marry him (see 6:17-20). John the Baptist may have been beheaded at Machaerus (see 6:21-26 and 27-29), which was “across the Jordan”. If this is true, the Pharisees’ testing Jesus “across the Jordan” may have involved less a desire to learn Jesus’ theological position on the issue of divorce and remarriage than an attempt to ensnare him in an affirmation that would have angered Herod. This may be why the question is worded as it. If this were simply an in-house Jewish question, one might expect a question concerning the just cause for divorce.⁹

1.1.3 Counter Question by Jesus and Pharisees Response (Mark 10:3-4)

Jesus’ counter question asks what Moses commanded in the Torah. For Jesus (1:44; 7:10; 10:3; 12:26), as well as for the Pharisees (10:4; 12:19) Moses was the author of the Law/Pentateuch. In fact Moses gives no “command” about divorce. Rather in Deut 24:1-4 (the only passage in the Torah that deals with divorce) the possibility of divorce is taken for granted. What is at issue there is the case of a man who divorces his wife and wants to remarry her after she has been

⁶ G. R. Donahue D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (SPS; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) 293.

⁷ W. Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Mark* (NTC, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1982) 375.

⁸ Cf. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 82.

⁹ Cf. M.D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (BNTC; London: Black, 1991) 235. However, some have argued from 11QTemple 57.17-19 that divorce and remarriage were prohibited by the Qumran Community, but it appears more likely that this refers to the prohibition of polygamy. For this see, D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 61-72.

married to some other man and divorced by him. According to Deut 24:4 the first husband is not allowed to take her again as his wife. In the Torah and elsewhere in the Bible (even in the case of Joseph and Mary in Matt 1:19) it is assumed that divorce is the husband's prerogative.

By employing the word *enetailato* ("command") in v. 3 Jesus has put his opponents on the defensive and forces them to use the more correct term *epetrepesen* ("allowed").¹⁰ Their admission that Moses allowed divorce leaves the question of "commanding" open and prepares for Jesus' contention that Moses did so because of the people's hardness of heart.

There was much debate within Judaism about the meaning of the expression "something indecent/objectionable/offensive" (*erwat dābār*), which, according to Deut 24:1, justified divorce. The school of Shammai rendered the expression conservatively and permitted divorce only in the case of sexual unchastity by the wife. The school of Hillel interpreted it more liberally and permitted divorce for such things as a wife spoiling her husband's supper or his finding someone more attractive than her (m. 9.10; b. 90a-b). In the Talmud a lengthy tractate is devoted to the issue of divorce. Clearly to focus on what God (Moses) "allows" (but disapproves of) due to the hardness of the human heart (10:5), rather than on what he commands and wills, reveals a misguided focus.¹¹ France¹² points out that Deut 24:1-4 does not even "permit" divorce but rather seeks to "regulate" it. It may also seek to discourage hasty divorce.

A certificate of divorce according to Deut 24:1.3, the husband writes out a document declaring that he has divorced his wife and sent her away. An example of such a writ of divorce has been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls from *Murabbaat* (Mur 19 ar): "I divorce and repudiate of my own free will, I Joseph son of Naqsan,....you my wife, Miriam.... So that you are free on your part to go and become a wife of any Jewish man that you please". Possession of this certificate provides the woman with the legal proof that the marriage had ended and made it possible for her to marry someone else. In this sense the certificate offers the woman legal protection against the claims of her former husband and the possibility of starting a new life.

1.1.4 Jesus' concluding Pronouncement (Mark 10:5-9)

Jesus' reply to the Pharisees is twofold. The first part (10:5) responds to the answer given by the Pharisees and points out that the OT reference quoted Deut 24:1 was not imperatival in nature but concessive. It does not set forth the absolute and perfect will of God but his will in light of human sin.¹³ It was a concession that God permitted due to sin, due to the "hardness of human hearts" (*sklērokardian*)¹⁴ for the sake of the woman.¹⁵ It was meant to limit the problem of divorce, not to serve as license for this practice.¹⁶

¹⁰ E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (tr. D. H. Madvig; Richmond: John Knox, 1970) 203.

¹¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Bible and the Christian Life: A Collection of Essays* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985) 231, rightly states, "We ought to resist every temptation to tamper with the absoluteness, the perfection, of God's requirement which confronts us in the Genesis verses quoted by Jesus". See also, Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, 235, when he says that "because [Jesus'] concern is with what God wills, rather than with what the Law allows, he stands in opposition to legalism, which is concerned with definition rather than with wholehearted obedience"; likewise J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002) 302, states that "the divine intention for marriage cannot be determined from a text on divorce".

¹² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002) 390-391.

¹³ Cf. Cranfield, *The Bible and the Christian Life*, 229-30.

¹⁴ The term "hardness of heart" is found in the NT only here and in the parallel in Matt 19:8, but cf. Mark 3:5; 4:10-12; 6:52; 8:17.

Nevertheless, hardness of heart is a major biblical theme. Since in biblical anthropology the heart is the source of understanding and judgment as well as the emotions, hardness of heart involves closing off one's mind and emotions from the truth. In the early chapters of Exodus Pharaoh is portrayed as an example of hardness of heart. In Ps 95:7 the people of Israel are urged not to follow the bad example of their ancestors as they wandered in the wilderness. In Mark 3:5 Jesus' opponents in the synagogue are accused of hardness of heart and in 4:10-12 the general public's failure to understand the parables is explained in terms of prophesy about hardness of heart in Isa 6:9-10. Therefore in the context of this text about marriage and divorce Jesus interprets Deut 24:1-4 as a temporary concession by God to the spiritual weakness of the people.

By adding *humōn* ("your") to his explanation, Jesus moves the discussion from the abstract "hardness of human heart" to the sinful attitude manifested by the Pharisees in their discussion. Their reply focused on what God permitted in such instances due to sin rather than what God's purpose and intention is in marriage. Why do they quote Deut 24:1-4 instead of Gen 1:27 and 2:24. Why not quote Mal 2:16.¹⁷

The second part of Jesus' reply (10:6-9) consists of his understanding of the divine intention of marriage. As the basis of his argument, Jesus appeals to the divine purpose "from the beginning of creation" (*apo archēs ktiseōs*; note its emphatic position at the start of 10:6) found in Gen 1:27 (and 5:2) and 2:24 before the "fall" in Gen 3. The idea is that these texts override or "trump" Moses' concession to hardness of heart in Deut 24:1-4. Here it seems that Jesus does not appeal to the new eschatological situation brought about by the arrival of the kingdom of God¹⁸ but rather to God's purpose in creation.

God created humanity as male and female. This is according to Priestly Creation account (Gen 1:1-2:3). The fact that God created humankind as male and female provides the presupposition for Jesus' positive teaching about married people constituting "one flesh". And "because of this" (*heneken toutou*), that is God's creation of them¹⁹ not the woman's origin from man (this is against the position of Taylor who maintains the contrary position),²⁰ a man shall leave (*kataleipsei*, an imperatival future) and father and mother and be joined to his wife. *Proskollethesetai* is a divine passive indicating that God is the person joining them (see also 10:9). The last phrase of v. 7 is missing in many manuscripts. Its absence can be explained as an error by a scribe whose eye skipped from *καὶ* ("and") to *καὶ* ("and") and the beginning of v. 8. Or its presence in many other manuscripts can be explained as a correction by a scribe who wanted to give the full text of Gen 2:24. The passage describes the climax of the second (Yahwist-Elohistic=JE) creation account (Gen 2:4-25) according to which Adam was created first and then the woman Eve was formed from his rib. In the context of the argument in Mark 10,6-9 marriage

¹⁵ R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium: Kommentar zu 8,27-16,20* (HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 123; similarly, R. F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1992) 95. In fact Gundry, *Mark*, 538 argues that the purpose of Deut 24:1 was not as a concession but rather to incite people like the Pharisees to divorce their wives and disobey God's ordinance. This, however, reads Paul's understanding of the Law into the present situation.

¹⁶ Cf. B. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001) 276.

¹⁷ Even b. Git. 90b acknowledges the great sorrow that divorce brings to God.

¹⁸ This is against the position of Donahue – Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 294.

¹⁹ Cf. R. F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1992) 97.

²⁰ V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indexes* (London: MacMillan, 1952) 418.

between a man and a woman represents a kind of reunification. This joining, witnessed above all in their sexual union (cf. 1 Cor 6:16), results in the two becoming one flesh.

Thus, according to the divine purpose, they are no longer two²¹ (a male and a female) but one (a couple, or better “a coupled one”). In the light of this “oneness” rather than “twoness”, divorce destroys the unity of the divine purpose. Jesus ends his response to the Pharisees with a warning. Since it is God who has created male and female and their “oneness” in marriage, “you shall not sever” this divinely created unity.

The verb *sunezeuxen* in v.9 (“joined together”) is a compound verb which consists of a preposition/prefix *sun* (“with”) and the root *zeug-*, which can describe two animals united by a “yoke” (*zeugos*). By extension it refers to a pair, or in this case a married couple. According to the logic of our text (vv.6-9) the original will of the Creator in creating man and woman was that they should constitute “one flesh” in an indissoluble union. According to Deut 24:1-4 only the husband could initiate divorce proceedings the “man” in this verse must be the husband (see 10:12) rather than a third party such as the judge. Therefore, the Markan Jesus does away with the institution of divorce by prohibiting the husband from initiating the procedure. Hence no one created by God should seek to undo and separate, that is, divorce²², what God the Creator, has created in marriage by making the two into one²³.

1.1.5 A Teaching on the Subject to the Disciples (Mark 10:11-12)

In 10:10 Mark changes the scene “again” to a house where the disciples ask Jesus concerning the previous teachings and Jesus instructs them in private. For Jesus giving his disciples private instructions about his teaching see also 4:10-12; 7:17-23; 9:28.33 and 10:23-31. It is uncertain whether 10:11-12 is an independent teaching of Jesus (cf. Matt 5:32; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10-11) that has been added to 10:2-9. If it is, then it is uncertainty as to whether it was Mark or the pre-Markan tradition that brought them together. In favour of Mark having joined them is the seam-like nature of 10:10.²⁴ However, as it stands, 10:10-12 turns Jesus’ general teaching of the crowds and Pharisees (10:1-2) on the subject into instruction on discipleship in this area. This, therefore, causes 10:10-12 to fit well the pattern of passion prediction, an error by the disciples, and teaching on disciples found in 8:31-10:45 (see also 8:22-10:52).

We find parallels to Jesus’ teaching on divorce (10:11-12) in Luke 16:18; Matt 5:32; 19:9; and 1 Cor 7:10-11. The Markan form of the teachings in 10:11 is generally considered to be more authentic than the two parallels found in Matt 5:32 and 19:9, that contain the famous exception clause that prohibits divorce “except for fornication [*porneia*]”. There are several reasons for this. For one the Markan wording is more difficult, since it does not appear to allow divorce for any reason. Therefore, it is easier to see Matthew helping his community adapt Mark’s teaching to their situation than Mark making Matthew’s form of saying more difficult for his own community. Next, the Lukan version agrees with Mark for he does not allow for any exception. Furthermore, Paul’s version of Jesus’ teaching on divorce also agrees with Mark more closely

²¹ Although “the two” of mark 10:8 is not found in Gen 2:24 MT, the LXX has “the two”, which simply makes explicit what is implied in the Hebrew text.

²² Cf. J. Painter, *Mark’s Gospel: Worlds in Conflict* (London: Routledge,1997) 14.

²³ Cf. Gundry, Mark, 531.

²⁴ For this see J. D. Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper&Row,1983) 210. However, E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNT.SS4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) 100, is contra.

than with Matthew. Although he apparently allows for divorce in the case of desertion by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor 7:12-15), Paul appears to be unfamiliar with Matthew's exception clause.²⁵

According to Mark 10,11, for a man to divorce his wife and marry another is an act of adultery against his first wife. The Greek term (*ep'autēn*) is best rendered "against her" (cf. 3:24-26; 13:8,12; 14:48) rather than "with her", that is with the second wife.²⁶ This allows the feminine singular pronoun "her/she" in 10-12 to allude to the same woman. Jesus' saying is quite remarkable, for in Israel a man was generally considered an adulterer only when he had an extramarital sexual relationship with a married woman, and he was guilty of an adultery against the husband of this woman, not his own wife. However, if a woman had an extramarital sexual relationship with a married man, she was guilty of adultery against her own husband. Jesus points out that by an extramarital affair a married man was just as guilty of adultery as a married woman²⁷, for there is no difference between "male" and "female" (cf. Gal 3:28). There is no need to see a conflict between Mark 10:9, which forbids divorce, and 10:11, which forbids remarriage after divorce. In Judaism, divorce always included the right to remarry. The very act of divorce assumes that remarriage can follow: "You are free to marry whomever you will" (m. Git).²⁸ Thus, there is no conflict between 10:9 and 10:11 but rather a difference in emphasis on the act of divorce-remarriage.

Many scholars are of the view that 10:12 is a secondary addition to 10:11, reflecting the situation of the church in the Roman world,²⁹ for Jewish women could not divorce their husbands in Israel.³⁰ However, divorce was both possible and common among Roman women (cf. Rom 7:2-3). While it was generally true that Jewish women could not divorce their husbands in Israel, there were exceptions (cf. Sir 23:22-23).³¹ More important, however, is that a very famous example of Mark 10:12 existed in Galilee. This involved the case of Herodias, who divorced her husband Herod Philip and married Herod Antipas. John the Baptist was ultimately martyred for rebuking Herod Antipas for marrying a woman who had divorced her husband (who was actually a brother to Herod). Herodias was partly Jewish. The principle which Jesus here enunciates is that such violations of the sacred institution of marriage, whether committed by the husband or by the wife, is adultery, an abomination in the eyes of the One who issued the creation and marriage ordinance (Gen 1:27; 2:24; 5:2).

²⁵ For the view that Mark 10:11-12 better reflect Jesus' actual words and that Matthew in 5:32 and 19:8 and Paul in 1 Cor 7:12-15 provide an application of Jesus' teaching to their own situation, see R. H. Stein, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J.B. Green – S. McKnight; Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1992) 196-98. This view interprets Jesus' words as an overstatement to emphasize the indissoluble nature of marriage and that divorce is an affront to the divine plan. Thus Jesus deals with the basic issue of the legitimacy of divorce in general, not with questions concerning the legitimate grounds for divorce as a "less worse" situation (as we find in Matt 19:3.9).

²⁶ Cf. Gundry, Mark, 541-42; Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 277-78.

²⁷ Cf. Gundry, Mark, 532-33.

²⁸ For an example of such certificate of divorce, see Donahue – Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 293; similarly, D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2002) 86-90.

²⁹ Cf. Best, *Following Jesus*, 100-101; similarly, R. F. Collins, *Sexual Ethics and New Testament: Behavior and Belief* (CNT; New York: Crossroad, 2000) 25-26.

³⁰ Cf. F. Josephus, *Antiquity*, 15.7.10 #259-60; 18.5.4 #136.

³¹ D. I. Brewer, "Jewish Women Divorcing their Husbands in Early Judaism: The Background to papyrus Şe'lim 13", *HTR* 92,349-57.

Thus it is quite possible that just as John the Baptist spoke of the adulterous nature of such a union, Jesus also rebuked such a union in 10:12,³² and the fact that 10:11-12 forms a kind of synonymous parallelism argues in favour of its authenticity. The rebukes of Jesus and John the Baptist stand in sharp contrast to today's concern that would seek not to be condemnatory and would see Herod's and Herodias's lifestyle as quite acceptable.

2. Theology and Its Application

Two clear Markan themes can be found in our pericopé. One involves Christology. Jesus by his magnetic personality once again draws not just a crowd but "crowds" (10:1). His uniqueness is witnessed to in the passage not by miracles or exorcisms but by his authoritative teaching of the Scriptures (cf. 1:22; 7:1-23; 12:18-37). His teaching provides the definitive word on the Scriptures. One might expect that the climax of Jesus' teaching would come in his quotation of what he teaches on the subject in 10:6-8. However, it comes not here but in his personal pronouncement of what he claims the Law teaches in 10:9,11-12.³³ Jesus' pronouncement is ultimately based not on a logical deduction from Scripture but rather on his declaration of the will of God with respect to Scripture.³⁴ Thus, by means of a few simple words, Jesus discourages divorce, refutes the rabbinical misinterpretation of the law, reaffirms the law's true meaning, censures the guilty party, defends the innocent, and throughout it all upholds the sacredness and inviolability of the marriage bond as ordained by God. The Christological question once again arises: "Who is this man" who teaches like this? Where is this norm-shattering authority with which Jesus teaches"³⁵ come from? Mark teaches that it comes from God himself, who anointed Jesus, his Son, as the Christ (1:1,10-11).

A second Markan theme which we discover involves what it means to be a disciple and follow Jesus with respect to marriage. Although the principle given in 10:2-12 is applicable to all people because the creator has determined that this is how his creation should live, Mark intends that 10:2-12 should be understood in of the call to discipleship in 8:34 (cf. 10:10-11a). The followers of Jesus cannot live a life based on what God has conceded (Deut 24:1) due to human sinfulness (Mark 10:5). "Divorce... no matter how nuanced its defence or how clearly justified, violates God's design for human marriage."³⁶ And this is not permissible for Jesus' disciples.

Therefore, those who are thinking about following Jesus must commit themselves to a life of monogamy and fidelity. This teaching is not based on a higher standard brought about by the arrival of the kingdom of God. Nor should we see here a special, higher standard given to the church to fulfil its priestly and royal function.³⁷ Jesus rather calls for a wholehearted commitment to do what God ordained at creation with respect to marriage. Mark, following Jesus, is not interested in speculating when a divorce may be a "less worse" situation than a "bad marriage". There is no such thing as a "good divorce". Every divorce witnesses to a failure of God's purpose in marriage, which should be an indissoluble union. Perhaps, in a dangerous and

³² Cf. F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906) 99-101; similarly, J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2002) 304-5.

³³ Cf. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, 234.

³⁴ Cf. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 302.

³⁵ Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 535.

³⁶ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 84.

³⁷ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 84, is not in support of this position.

abusive marriage, divorce may be a lesser evil, but Mark intentionally leaves Jesus' teaching on this subject in its unqualified hyperbolic form.

Another important element appears in the above pericopé. In vv.11-12 the rights of the husband and wife are equally balanced. Before God they are the same in worth. Is the husband "an heir to the grace of life"? The wife is a fellow-heir" (1Pet 3:7). She is not her husband's property. She is his partner. To be sure, the husband remains "the head of the wife" (Eph 5:22.23) but before the Lord both are equally precious. A wife who has by sovereign grace accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour does not feel any need to join the so-called Women's Liberation Movement. The Bible offers her something far better, for Jesus placed husband and wife in a relationship of equality. In these respects His teaching went beyond Jewish and Pagan conceptions, giving to marriage a position of the highest dignity. This positive emphasis is his gift to the Church and the world.

2.1 Lesson from the Pericopé for Married Couples

In their application of Jesus' teaching on divorce to their own situations, Matthew (5:32; 19,9) and Paul (1 Cor 7:12-15) explicitly allow for divorce and remarriage in case of sexual immorality and desertion by an unbelieving spouse. Are there other instances in which divorce is permitted? What about physical abuse of a wife and sexual abuse of children? In such cases, is divorce permissible?³⁸ One should not expect in the twenty-two words of Mark 10:11-12 a ruling that can cover every hypothetical situation that might present itself.

In light of the frequency of divorce today, should we not, like Jesus, emphasize the permanency of marriage in the divine plan rather than seeking "good reasons for divorce"? For those contemplating divorce, it is important to consider, how will I explain to a holy and righteous God why I chose to divorce my husband/wife despite Jesus' teaching in 10:11-12? There are instances, I should think, where divorce is a "less worse" alternative, but every divorce witnesses to a failure of the divine purpose in marriage, and surely the burden of proof must always rest with those claiming that their situation constitutes an exception to 10:11-12.

It is more difficult to apply His teaching to the problem of divorce in the modern world. For Christians His words are regulative, but in particular cases they need to be interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) and the Church. It cannot be assumed that the question is settled by simply quoting His words; for the record is limited to His reply to a hostile question.

The individual Christian will not be left in doubt if he will observe them under the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in his own understanding. For the society at large the issue is more complex. Still less in this realm can the words of Jesus be treated as laws. Nevertheless, for its own protection and well being, society will do well to be guided by His positive teaching in defining grounds for divorce which threaten personal and family life. In the social question the church has a vital part to play. It has duty to insist that Christ's emphasis on the sanctity of the marriage relationship is the over-riding principle by which grounds divorce must be judged.

Christianity has been in Africa for over a century and therefore cannot be regarded as a young religion in the continent.³⁹ Since its' beginning, Christianity has been a major actor and has mammoth influence in almost all facets of African's way of life. One of the areas of Christian

³⁸ I know of a pastor who, while counselling a woman whose husband was physically abusing her, suddenly had his counselling come to an end when the woman's husband kills her.

³⁹ Though to compare it with Europe where it has stayed for centuries, it is still young.

influence has been in marriage, where the Church insists on monogamous marriage as the correct marriage and the “most ideal way of expressing Christian married love”.⁴⁰ This assertion has its foundation in biblical texts as one of the texts we analysed proved. However, this has not prevented some of its members from divorce and remarriage. Among the majority of African people marriage is in general life-long union and divorce has to be justified by factors such as cruelty, non-compatibility or sorcery⁴¹ and lack of children especially male ones.

The theology of marriage brewed in an African pot ought to have its fundamental ingredients as history, sociology, culture, context and anthropology.⁴² “I must insist that some sociological groundwork is necessary if any theological reflection on the family is to be realistic and make sense at all. Such ground work is ignored at great cost,”⁴³ affirms Magesa. This implies that any constructive and meaningful biblical/theological reflection and pastoral concerns on marriage especially in Africa have to be put into consideration culture, context, history, anthropology and socio-economic factors. A strong practical pastoral care in matters of marriage is grounded on sound theological reflection.

It is my submission that in many African societies marriage remains a powerful institution with deeply rooted and protected rights and privileges that are expressed and entrenched by ritual and ceremony. Marriage entails an elaborate and long negotiation, and once contracted remains a permanent contract. But things are changing, as there appears to be a bottomless gulf between the Biblical and Magisterial teachings on marriage and the reality on the ground, even among the Africans who also understand marriage as a permanent contract.

2.2 Solution and Pastoral Care for Challenged Christians

This last section of our paper seeks to advocate a charitable treatment of those Catholics whose marriages have broken down. The Church should improve her pastoral care on these children of God and invest more energy in adequately preparing young Catholics for marriage and not leaving it unto the hands of Catechists and sometimes to un-informed lay men and women.

Family is one of the social institutions the Church values most. The Second Vatican Council and later on John Paul II revived the Church Fathers’ understanding of family as “*ecclesia domestica*” (Church in miniature).⁴⁴ It is the Christian families that are expected to bear witness to Jesus and the Gospel. Actually, there is no abstract Church but concrete Christian families that strive day and night to live their faith. In other words it is not wrong to affirm that the Church, among many other definitions, is also the sum total of Christian Families. Hence the future of the Church is tightly bound to the one of Christian families; since every Christian in one way or another comes from a family. Truly the future of the world as a whole is at stake in families. Without families there is no future for the world. Ecclesia in Africa even goes a step further by

⁴⁰ Cf. C. V. J. Kyara, “New Evangelization and the Incidence of Polygamy”, *Hekima Review* 48 (May 2013) 41. It is not our interest here to go into discussing the issues concerning monogamy or polygamy, for this topic see the article of K. Ogot, “No Monogamy, No Marriage! The Complexity of the Sacrament of Marriage in Africa”, *Hekima Review* 50 (May 2014) 81-91.

⁴¹ Cf. A. Hastings, *Christian Marriage in Africa* (Berks: Hollen Street Press, 1973) 35.

⁴² Cf. Ogot, “No Monogamy, No Marriage”, 86-87.

⁴³ L. Magesa, “Reconstructing the African Family”, In *Marriage and Family in African Christianity* (eds. A. A. Kyomo – S. G. Selvan) (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2004) 9.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, 1981, # 49.

portraying the Church in Africa as God's family.⁴⁵ In the minds of the Synodal Fathers, in an Africa family is such a central and life-giving reality that Africans cannot fully grasp what the Church is unless it is presented to them as the family of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Hence, the Church as the Family of God must become the most relevant metaphor and the key expression in the hands of those carrying out the mission of evangelization in Africa.

The Church holds the family so dear to the point of using high theological analogies in describing the reality of marriage. One of such is to equate the relationship between two people committed to each other in marriage to the loving bond between Christ and the Church. Hence, marriage is something sacred. Since the bond between Christ and the Church is indissoluble, the marital bond too is unbreakable. But the sad reality of disintegration of many marriages will definitely lead to the breaking down of society.

There are many Church documents on marriage and family life. Many of them talk with compassion and pain on the sad reality of broken marriages and families. But the reality on the ground is that many divorced Catholics are often left on the margins of the Christian Community. No doubt, some dioceses have come up with practical means of helping these folks to overcome the unavoidable suffering and pain they face. Still, up till present, there are no systematic Church guidelines on how divorced and broken families should be accompanied and counselled. In parishes, some priests are often annoyed when they have to deal with divorced Catholics. Some priests just do not know what to do with them.⁴⁶ Divorced Catholics need above all the help of the Church because divorce is a traumatic experience.

2.2.1 New Pastoral Approach to Divorced Catholics

The Magisterium is not inhuman when she prevents her faithful to divorce and submits divorced Catholics to tough laws. No doubt, the Church is concerned with preserving the stability of society and dignity of marriage. Since consequences of divorce for both parents and children are catastrophic, it is better for divorce to be avoided. Divorce goes against Christian values of patience and love. In Christian understanding, true "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (1 Cor 13:7-8). The Church does not want to give her blessings to Catholics who seek divorce because the permanence of marriage will be engendered. If the Church does so she would have forgotten the values of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus (according to the text of Mark we analysed above) in order to follow worldly principles that tolerate unlimited freedom and shield those who do not keep their promises. No doubt, the Church aims at avoiding and preventing cases of divorce among her members. However, the means she employs to achieve this appears not to be very efficient because regardless of these efforts, many Catholics still divorce. In other words, the Church needs to think of new means of preventing divorce and handling cases of divorce which have already taken place.

I suggest that the new pastoral approach in the Church will be twofold. The first part of this approach should stress youth education and preparation for marriage. The second approach should be pastoral counseling of divorced Catholics.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, On the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000, 1995, #63.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. Castelli, *What the Church is doing for Divorced and Remarried Catholics* (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 1978) 18.

The best way to prevent divorces in the Church is to give more time for preparation to those who want to receive the sacrament of matrimony. Actually matrimony is a very important sacrament because it unites two persons forever. Furthermore, matrimony has crucial social, religious and cultural implications in the lives of Christians. It is surprising to notice that this preparation is not taken seriously. The time Catechumens spend preparing for the sacraments of Christian initiation varies from six months to five years. In some countries and dioceses, people spend less time in the catechumenate; but in other places catechumenate lasts for years. Generally, people would not be allowed to receive Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation unless they have been introduced to the truths of the Catholic faith for a period at least six months. There are some exceptions of people who have received these sacraments of Christian Initiation after three or four months of preparation. These exceptions are rare. Seminarians and young religious spend many years readying themselves for Holy Orders. Those in charge of formation in seminaries and religious formation houses only approve their young men for ordination when they judge them worthy and ready for this. Otherwise they are given more time to reflect, pray and work on particular areas of their lives. The Church should be more merciful with divorced Catholics, but stricter on conditions that candidates to matrimony must fulfil before their union is blessed by her. The first of these conditions could be to spend at least a whole year of spiritual direction and preparation to marriage whereby candidates are made aware of the Christian understanding of marriage and its implications.

This work of preparation of young Catholics to marriage should also involve experienced Christian couples. Since priests, because they are single and celibate, sometimes are not experienced enough in this matter. They have a theoretical knowledge of how Christians are expected to lead their conjugal life; but they lack concrete experience in this area. In other words, elderly and experienced catholic couples must help young Catholics to make the difference between courtship love – which is romantic and somehow idealist – and conjugal love which requires sacrifices and daily commitment to remain faithful to one's spouse.⁴⁷

The permanence of marriage is an ideal and a high ideal which must be preserved. But the reality on the ground is that Catholics sometimes fail to reach this ideal. Therefore, the Church has to look for means to help these folks. Post-divorce counselling is one of these. Divorced Catholics need committed pastors who can help them to face the trauma of divorce and start their lives anew. "Post-divorce counselling can change your life for the better. Many people are needlessly cast adrift emotionally during divorce proceedings and never recover from the shock of what has happened to them. Men, women, and children may undergo silent, heroic turmoil when the intensity of their feelings could be assuaged by a compassionate counsellor".⁴⁸ Post-divorce counselling can also be carried out by divorced Catholics groups. Dioceses can create more groups of this kind so that the divorced meet and share their difficulties with people who live in similar conditions and seek solutions together.

In human life, failures are not exclusively bad experiences. They are also occasions of grace which make human beings wiser and more cautious. There are endless examples of people who have been transformed and bettered by the failures they experienced throughout their life.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. T. Catoir, *Catholics and Broken Marriage* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1979) 23.

⁴⁸ Cf. J. R. Rue – L. Shanahan, *The Divorced Catholic* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972) 220.

Conclusion

Recognition of the complexities involved in the NT evidence about marriage and divorce should not be allowed to obscure the positive character of Jesus' teaching about husband and wife constituting "one flesh". This teaching must be placed in the context of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom and the radical demands it may make on people. On the one hand, Jesus has a vision of a restored creation in which unity and mutuality in marriage mirror God's original plan. On the other hand, Jesus summons men and women to a discipleship that recognizes the radical demands of God by precluding divorce just as in some cases it may preclude marriage (cf. Matt 19:10-12). The God of Jesus is a merciful and understanding God. Several times in Salvation history, he forgives and gives a second chance to sinners and repentant: after the flood in Noah's day (Gen 6-9), after the Israelites' disobedience in the wilderness, after David's sin with Uriah's wife and hosts of other examples. God's anger never lasts forever. In the Gospels, Jesus' ministry is a ministry of forgiveness. Therefore, the Church that follows Jesus' prophetic mandate must also incorporate in its life her pastoral sensitivity toward those in irregular relationships (see John 4:7-42; 7:53-8:11), especially through counselling and encouraging them to join some charitable and Catholic movements. Indeed Pope Francis remarked "we are on the way towards a deeper matrimonial pastoral care".⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, Vatican Information Service, (31 July 2014) 20.