

# **Mark 12: 28-34: A Close Reading**

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## **Table of Contents**

Part One: Introduction	6
1.1 Introduction	6
1.2 Methodology	8
1.3 Textual Considerations	13
1.4 Did Mark have a Theology?	15
Part Two: The Pericope as a Whole	19
2.1 Mark 12:28-34 and Its History of Criticism	19
2.2 Redaction Criticism	25
2.3 The ‘Text Grammar’ Reading of Wolfgang Oswald	28
2.4 Narrative Criticism	30
Part Three: A Close Reading	32
3.1 Entrance of the Scribe	32
3.2 Jesus’ Answer	39
3.3 The Conjunction and the Change	40
3.4 The <i>Shema</i>	42
3.5 By What Authority does Jesus Change the Text?	49
3.6 The Answer of the Scribe	53
3.7 The Reaction of Jesus	57
3.8 No One Dared to Question Him Further	64
3.9 The Version in Matthew and Luke	67
3.10 Conclusion to Part Three	68
Part Four: A Speculative Theology	73
4.1 Introduction	73
4.2 The Notion of ‘Mystery’ in Catholic Theology	74
4.3 Dogmatic Certainties	78
4.4 The Self-consciousness of Christ	88
4.5 What Really is ‘Self-consciousness?’	89
4.6 Self-consciousness as Transcendental	98
4.7 The Relation between Objective and Subjective Knowledge	102
4.8 Self-consciousness Denotes Human Knowledge	103

4.9	Self-consciousness as Non-conceptual	105
4.10	The Infallibility of Self-consciousness	108
4.11	Jesus and the Scribe	110
4.12	Areas for Further Study and Conclusion	113

## **Part One: Introduction**

## 1.1 Introduction

Jesus Christ himself may be called the first Christologist. When He said to the apostles “Who do people say the Son of Man is<sup>1</sup>?” He sanctioned the practice of reflection on whom and what He is. In a certain sense, every single Christian must answer that question for him or herself. This is the work of the Church and only when the Lord comes again will that work be complete.

We must also remember that the work of Christology is not performed by words alone. Indeed, every action of the Church, every action of every single Christian in the name of the Lord, is a chapter in the Christology that the Body of Christ, His Church, writes.

Perhaps the most important Christologies are not the tomes of scholars but rather the actions of people who believe in the Lord and let Him be the motivation behind their good deeds. Perhaps the most effective Christologies are the simple acts of love that are performed in the name of Jesus. Perhaps a Teresa of Calcutta binding a dying person’s wounds may be writing a Christology far more profound than any text in any library. It is important to acknowledge that orthopraxy may be far more important than orthodoxy.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16: 18

Nevertheless, it is still important to reflect conceptually on the nature of the Lord whom we worship and imitate. Remember that He Himself was the first to ask “Who do people *say* that I am?” The Church of Jesus Christ will always be grateful to the women and men who work hard at reflecting on the nature of the Lord and who record those reflections for posterity.

Chief among these reflections are the Gospel writers. As Roman Catholics, we believe that the Bible holds a pre-eminent place in the annals of theological reflection. These early witnesses to the Lord who were inspired by the Holy Spirit have written Christologies that are normative for the Church. Certainly, all the Gospel writers clearly intended to answer Christ’s question “Who do you say that I am?”

This dissertation is an exercise in Biblical Christology. Its purpose is to examine one episode in the Gospel of Mark and to try to understand the Christology that is both explicit and implicit in that passage. Mark 12: 28-34 is the story of a Scribe who was not far from the Kingdom. Why was he not far from the Kingdom? What does this passage have to say about the nature of Jesus Christ? What did Mark want to say? What did Mark say without perhaps even realizing he was saying it? Most of all, what did *Jesus* have to say about Himself in this passage? We hope to examine this pericope and unpack some of its meaning and so contribute to the work of

Christology that our Church is commissioned to do. In order to do this we will perform a close reading of the passage.

## 1.2 Methodology

We will ultimately follow the methodology that Pamela Tamarkin Reis uses with the Old Testament in taking a fresh look at this New Testament passage. Reis is a Jewish woman who is not a professional theologian or linguist. However, she is passionate about the Jewish scriptures. Reis believes that students of the Bible are sometimes too mesmerized by documentary hypothesis. It is possible that they focus on their narrow point of view and neglect the whole picture. The bible stories should be read and respected as a whole. Only when it is proven beyond a doubt that various passages are pasted together should such be accepted as true. Even then, it must be remembered that the document of concern is the one we have, not its earlier versions. She reads the texts as integral and intelligible works of literature in themselves. Looking at the text first and foremost as a unified whole is called “narrative criticism” or “narrative hermeneutic.” We must be mindful that although “the Bible is a faith document” and at any point might “reflect a particular theology,” but close reading sometimes reveals an artistry that is remarkable and seamless

enough to stand on its own two feet.<sup>2</sup> She reads the texts and analyzes them as literary works and yet she is well-informed by modern scholarship and traditional Jewish interpretation.

For example, her reading of 1 Samuel 28<sup>3</sup> illustrates this technique. She reviews a scripture scholar who sees things from the “seamy side (sic)!” That is, he pointed out the occasions where he saw bad joins, or seams, of disparate material. This teacher was paying such close attention to source criticism that he failed to see the forest because of the trees. Reis appreciates the incongruities that this source and form critic noticed. She takes them very seriously. But she saw more: by accepting the whole story as a narrative that was put together for a purpose and not just pasted together because the writer had spare parts left over, she was able to appreciate the whole picture. What is the whole picture? Commentators in the past have seen the visit of Saul to the witch as a desperate measure that he was “talked into” by his men. They get him to seek out a witch that escaped his earlier pogrom. After all, what has he got to lose? And, after all, nobody will know. He goes to the witch but much to his chagrin the witch has no word of comfort for him. Instead, the witch’s conjuring of Samuel seals Saul’s fears and fate. According to these commentators, the witch then tries to

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<sup>2</sup> Reis, Pamela Tamarkin. *Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible*. Henrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2002, p. 11 and other pages. (Hereafter “*Lines*”)

<sup>3</sup> *Lines*, p. 147. This whole section is from this chapter and any quoted material is hers.

“comfort and appease” Saul by providing him food and drink. In this kind of interpretation, the witch is looked at as a quasi-follower of Saul. At least she is evaluated inasmuch as she caters to his needs and succumbs to his agenda. Note carefully that these commentators do not treat the witch as a witch but rather as a possible helper to Saul or a potential helper of the Jews.

Reis’s reading is somehow different. She respects the story as a whole and looks at it with a clear interpretation of the words in the narrative and the roles of the characters. She realizes that the witch is in fact in much the same position as the last (hypothetical) Jewish dentist in Berlin in the waning days of the Second World War. Just as Saul rid the land of witches, so Hitler rid the land of Jews. But this dentist managed to hide and be protected by his grateful and admiring clientele, just as the witch must have been protected and hidden by her clientele.

One day, three strangers arrive at the dentist’s hideaway. The dentist recognizes one as Hitler: suffering from toothache and needing the dentist’s skills. The dentist is terrified but the patient says “just do your job and all will be alright.” What should the dentist do? If he cures the toothache, the patient will no longer need him and perhaps turn him over to the Gestapo. The dentist has the ability to kill the patient, using his dental apparatus and drugs, but what would the other two bodyguards do? Could he apply a

temporary filling to simply buy time? But the Russian guns are heard in the East! No time!

There would be no time either for the witch, for Samuel pointed out that Saul would die in the morning. What to do? The clever, cunning and resourceful witch conjures up a plan. The meal that the witch prepares was no dainty for a king's consolation: it was a blood-sacrifice covenant to idolatry which bound the witch and King Saul together in apostasy! She manipulated Saul into sin that assured her safety. Reis saw this meaning by appreciating all the insights of all kinds of biblical criticism and yet respecting the passage as a whole and also respecting the roles of the characters in the story. The witch was a witch, not a nurturing, daft old lady.

In order to appreciate this whole picture, Reis has done what she calls a "close reading" of the passage, using the insights of all kinds of criticism but also respecting the passage as a whole. First, she states the fact that the previous commentators have missed the picture. She says that previous commentators have put this story in to show the "severity of the prophet balanced by the tenderness of the witch." For a long time, commentators have seen the witch as a slightly daft nurturer. But Reis says that the witch was an intelligent, adept, shrewd and professional Wicca whose craftiness and skill enables her to manipulate the terrified King Saul. She was not daft

but deft. Her “pagan will prevails over her adversary’s faltering monotheism.”

Reis recognizes that “the witch of Endor has cast a spell over biblical commentators.” Exegetes from Josephus to Jerome to the present time paint her as a paragon of womanly solicitude who provides a beneficent meal that fortifies Saul to face his certain death in battle. Reis recognizes that this is not the case. The witch is instead cleverly preserving her own life by manipulating Saul into a sexual encounter (note the reference to the bed in the biblical chapter) and getting him to share a pagan sacrificial meal that assures her own survival. She has gotten Saul to participate in a “mantic sacrifice that violates the stringently proscribed eating of blood..., created a covenant between the anointed Saul and an idolatrous shaman..., and warrants Saul’s consequent suicide.” This is the approach that we will use in interpreting our passage. We will respect and use the various insights of source criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism and Wolfgang Oswald’s “locution unit” (Cf. below) criticism. But in the end we will rely on looking at the passage as a unity that tells a story that makes a point about the behavior and person of Jesus Christ. We will respect that fact that the Scribe is precisely a scribe and that Mark needed a scribe for his own particular

reason. We will not be mesmerized into wondering if the Scribe is or is not a disciple!

### 1.3 Some Textual Considerations

In doing any work in the New Testament, one is confronted with the use of both Greek and Hebrew. The cultural milieu of the New Testament was in fact an amalgam of the Greek, Hebrew and Roman cultures. It is very difficult to tease out the different strands of tradition and world-view in any New Testament reality. We will try to concentrate on the cultural elements in order to understand our particular passage. When using Greek and Hebrew words we will use English transliterations. We must recognize that most people do not have facility in Hebrew, Greek and Latin; using transliterations enables us to mine the wealth of knowledge to be gained by a careful understanding of the terms but without denying access to people who are not conversant with the original languages. Even if one is not a Hebrew etymologist, one can understand the basic ideas by the use of readily available scholarly apparatus. The use of transliterations can make the work accessible to intelligent people who may lack fluency in the original languages but who can grasp the basic ideas in translation. Sometimes when one is confronted by a text filled with Hebrew and Greek quotations, the

result is a barrier rather than an entry. It is hoped that this thesis will be an entry rather than a barrier.

We will also compare it with the Gospel of Matthew and other *loci* in the New Testament. We will look at what is almost universally recognized as the special point of view of Matthew and then try to show how this view is not absent in Mark. We will try to show that one facet of the self-understanding of Christ was appreciated by a once-antagonistic, but later appreciative, questioner. Mark is generally thought of by most scripture scholars as the first of the Gospels to be written and as a source of the other synoptic gospels.<sup>4</sup> Our line of thought here is that if Matthew used some of Mark and re-tooled it to support a particular purpose, still the ideas of Jesus as the New Moses or the supreme lawgiver were not absent in Mark either. Following a detailed exegesis and unpacking of our pericope, in part 2, we will examine the conclusions dogmatically to come to some appreciation of the self-consciousness of Christ. We will see that the self-consciousness of Christ is not an easy concept to grasp but, once, grasped, may shed some light on the mystery of the Word made flesh.

#### 1.4 Did Mark have a Theology?

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<sup>4</sup> Schnelle, Udo. *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*. Tr. By M. Eugene Boring, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1998, p. 195 *et passim*.

The growth in criticism of the gospels has resulted in appreciation of the fact that the sacred evangelists were in fact both historians and theologians. They produced accurate reports of what Jesus said and did and they also tailored these events and sayings *vis-à-vis* the concrete life of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Our generation has blithely rejoiced in this discovery as though we were the first to notice it! Many of us may be unaware that even from the very beginning this insight existed in the Church! For example, the very earliest commentator that exists on the Gospel of Mark was Papias, a bishop, whom we know through the historian Eusebius.<sup>6</sup> Papias reported that Mark was the interpreter of Peter and Mark wrote down accurately everything that he remembered of Peter's preaching, though not in order, for he followed Peter's lead in *adjusting his teaching to the needs of the hearers*. **In other words, Mark had a particular point of view and he told the story of Jesus' life and teaching in the framework of that point of view, and that point of view in fact proved to be a viable way of presenting the person of Jesus Christ because in fact Mark knew that his hearers shared at least an openness to that point of view.** Is this a "theology?" Yes, it is, even though it is not a 'systematic theology' such as what we will be looking

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<sup>5</sup> Osborne, GR. "Theology of Mark" in *Elwell Evangelical Dictionary*, available at <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txw/marktheo.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Schnelle, U. *op. cit.*, p. 199.

at in section four of this paper. It might more properly be called a homiletic or a catechetical method. But in fact these are theologies.

In section four of this paper we will look at a properly systematic theology according to the paradigm of Bernard Lonergan. But here we point out that the Gospel of Mark has a particular homiletic or catechetical which is accurate, fruitful and inspired. Knowing the particular point of view helps us to understand what Mark had to say and helps us to understand the Person of Christ. Let us look at some of the major themes of the ‘theology’ of Mark.

Mark opens and ends his book with the title “Son of God.” (Cf. Mar 1:1 and 15:39.) The Markan proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God continues throughout the gospel, at Jesus’ baptism, transfiguration, in Jesus’ power over the demons, and in Jesus being seen as omniscient and omnipotent, even over the natural world.<sup>7</sup> Yet on the other hand Jesus shows the foibles and the wounds of a human. He grows indignant, suffers distress and sorrow, sighs, becomes weary and admits limitations regarding his abilities and his knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Mark’s Jesus is both exalted and humiliated.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mark 2:8; 5:32; 5:39; 6:48; 8:17; 9:4; 9:33; 11:2; 11:14; 12:9; 13:12

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mark 1:43; 3:5; 4:38; 6:5-6; 7:34; 8:12; 9:19; 10:14; 13:32; 14:33-36;

Scripture scholars have noticed this paradox. William Wrede tried to figure out what Mark was doing by using the idea of a “messianic secret.”<sup>9</sup> In this choreography, Jesus knows He is the Messiah, but realizes that the common idea of messiah was not the kind he wanted to be. So Jesus keeps His messiahship a secret until He fully reveals through the cross and resurrection exactly how He exercises that function. This idea carried a lot of weight for many years, but lately has begun to be seen as imaginative and as eisegetical.<sup>10</sup> Raisanen claims that Mark is a thoughtful author with his own theology of Christ, but to try to find the ‘messianic secret’ as a tool of Mark requires a lot of manhandling of the Gospel text.

Far simpler and more patent is the idea that Mark simply proclaimed the Jesus that he heard about from Peter: a Jesus who exhibited both these characteristics, a Jesus who was magnetic and mesmerizing enough to transform his hearers, a Jesus who eventually validated these seemingly exclusive aspects by his resurrection from the dead. The bottom line is that Mark paints a picture of Jesus who exhibited both divine and human attributes.

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<sup>9</sup> Wrede, W. *The Messianic Secret*. Tr. J. Greig. Cambridge, England: James Clark & Co., 1971, passim.

<sup>10</sup> Take for instance Raisanen, Heikki. *The ‘Messianic Secret’ in Mark’s Gospel*. Tr. Christopher Tuckett. Edinburgh, Scotland, Clark Co. 1990, p. 242. Udo Schnelle (*op. cit.*) summarizes the work of Pesch as making a similar argument. (Cf. Scnelle, p. 216-217.

Another way of looking at the point of view of Mark is to tease out his ideas on discipleship. Mark's whole gospel is a call to become a disciple of Christ. To Mark, this means buying into the idea that discipleship involves suffering. For Mark, discipleship involves taking up the cross and following Jesus. Here there is also a paradox: on the one hand the disciples are officially sent by Jesus with complete authority over demons and the natural world and with a close relationship with God (Cf. Mark 6:7-13) yet on the other hand the disciples fail to comprehend His teaching (Cf. Mark 8:32-33). The disciples are both called to an awesome ministry and at the same time fail miserably to fulfill it.<sup>11</sup> Please note the thread that links all these different paradigms: there is a "both...and" structure. Both failure and success, both Divine and human, both heavenly and earthly. This will be developed later on in this paper.

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<sup>11</sup> Best, E. "Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Sheffield, England: Sheffield University Press, S4, 1981.

## Part Two: The Pericope as a Whole

### 2.1 Mark 12: 28-34 and Its History of Criticism

Here we need to survey in a brief way the most important representatives of the various schools of criticism that have examined our passage. First of all, we can be reasonably sure that the pericope of Mark 12: 28-34 does not present any serious textual problems. Scholars are in agreement that the text as it stands is genuine and consistent among all the various New Testament manuscripts<sup>12</sup>.

The first treatment that must be given to the passage might be what is called a “source criticism.” From ancient times, people have wondered whether or not the gospels were used as mutual sources. Some Fathers of the Church proposed that Mark was a shorter summary of Matthew and this idea perdured until the 17th century. Then, biblical scholars began analyzing the gospels and realized that this could not be true. The bottom line of all the work done from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present is that both Matthew and Luke depend on Mark and at least one other source which is

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<sup>12</sup> Metzger, Bruce. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994. (Not only in the 1994 edition but also in earlier editions. The 1971 edition published by the United Bible Societies, London and New York, also passes over this passage as not worthy of textual disputation.)

called “Q” (German, *quelle*, “source”). Mark is the first of the gospels. This is practically universally accepted.<sup>13</sup>

Second, it is necessary to clarify the genre of the passage. This is called Form Criticism. How precise must this identification be? Keerankeri, in his masterful and magisterial doctoral dissertation for the Pontifical Biblical Institute, studies this pericope from an exegetic-theological viewpoint, and spends much energy trying to determine exactly what kind of literary form the passage is, even to a sub-atomic level. Now it is true that the first step in understanding what the author intended to say is to determine the literary form that the author is using. Knowing the literary form of what we are reading causes us to read it with a particular pre-understanding. For example, we read the comics in the newspaper with a distinctively different mindset than we read the first page or the sports section. Pope Pius XII in *Divino afflante Spiritu* gave official Roman Catholic Church approbation to the necessity of this form criticism in determining what the author intended to say. It is the contention of this work that one can carry this attempt too far.

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<sup>13</sup> McIlhone, James P. “*The Lord Your God is One*” *A Redaction Critical Analysis of Mark 12:28-34*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, December 1987.

Father McIlhone summarizes all the work of scholars from Augustine to William Wrede, and the final result is that Mark is the earliest and most fundamental of the gospels. This insight is tremendously valuable but it does not take us very far. The next step, form criticism, is absolutely necessary, but it too takes us only so far!

Keerankeri studies a series of German authors on the point. He carries form criticism to the *n*th degree and achieves an awesome degree of literary distinction in forms. He decides that the passage is not what is called a *Streitgesprach*, or controversy-story. The passage does not have the questioner exhibiting a hostile intent. On the contrary, the scribe and Jesus obviously hit it off very well! Jesus tells him that he is “not far from the kingdom.” It is true, however, that the larger context of the pericope is a series of hostile encounters between Jesus and Jews.

Keerankeri says that most scholars consider it a *Schul(Lehr)gesprach*, or lesson, since the passage consists of questions and answers without a hostile intent. But Keerankeri disagrees with most scholars and claims that it is *sui generis*. Keerankeri calls it a *Dialoggesprach*, or dialogical interaction<sup>14</sup>. Now what is the point of this Germanic hairsplitting? The evangelist was probably unaware of the differences between these literary genera! The hairsplitting may come from the long and noble history of attempting to “prove” by various analyses that parts of books are written by different people at different times and for different purposes. For example, scripture scholars have opined that various parts of the book of Genesis were redacted by various authors or amanuenses. They then jump to the

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<sup>14</sup> Keerankeri, George. *The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12:28-34*. Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome, 2003, p.73s.

conclusion that they cannot be taken literally or historically. This may very well be true and attention must be paid to source criticism and form criticism. But it is equally possible that perhaps books in the bible were not “cut and pasted” as often as scripture scholars want to imagine. We cannot apply 21<sup>st</sup> century standards of honesty in authorship to 1<sup>st</sup> century writings. It is the contention of this author that the passage we are studying fits in very well with its context and does not need a separate literary form or catalogue code. Rather than try to cubbyhole the passage in a literary form it is better to simply read it and appreciate what the author was trying to say. McIlhone has also done form criticism on the passage and he concludes that it is enough to realize that the text of Mark is composed of sayings that existed prior to Mark, and that the source of these sayings was basically the missionary preaching of the Church. When Mark wrote these things down, he wrote them in light of the Resurrection. He also wrote them in the light of deteriorating relationships between Christians and Jews. The events and the sayings of Jesus were retold with the knowledge that He had risen from the dead. Mark definitely imposed a purpose on quoting Jesus’ words and describing Jesus’ deeds.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that he falsified or “spun” Jesus’ words. It is instead but to intentionally and consciously try to

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<sup>15</sup> McIlhone, JP, *op. cit.* p. 42ss.

understand Mark's theology in his molding of the gospel. According to the form critics, Mark used pre-existent oral and written traditions to form a biography of Jesus. As long as we realize that we cannot go far afield. The form critics successfully determined that the gospels were collections of apothegms or snippets. Form Criticism is a good undertaking; but if it is carried too far it will tend to mesmerize its followers like the Witch of Endor.

There *are* some few form-critical scholars who claim that perhaps Mark 12: 28-34 is not connected with its context but is rather an addition from a later hand. They say that since our scribe has a favorable and pleasant interchange with Jesus it could not be historically or factually or literarily part of the context in Mark. Given the hostility displayed by the questioners (Mark 12:13-17) and also the animus displayed by the Jewish leadership (Chapters 11 and 12), they would say that perhaps this interchange comes from a different source. This might indicate that the pericope reflects a hand other than Mark's. Perhaps it comes from an earlier pre-Markan tradition,<sup>16</sup> and the implications of this will be discussed later.

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<sup>16</sup> Trocme', E., "Jesus et les letters d'apres Marc 12: 28-40," *Foi Vie* 84 1-2, (1985) pp. 33-41.

Now it is true that the scribes are usually portrayed in Mark as Jesus' worst nightmare<sup>17</sup> and this contrasts very strongly with our scribe. However, it is also true that there are elements in the story that shows that our pericope is connected with what went before. For example, in verse 28, the scribe is introduced with a series of three verbs that explicitly connect our interchange with what went before. The scribe *had been listening*, he also *had observed* how adroitly Jesus responded, and he now *came up and asked a question*. If Mark 12:28-34 had been a later inclusion, these verbs would be absent. Could they have been added by a redactor? Possibly. But the redactor would be confessing that there needed to be a manufactured connection of some sort. And, why would a redactor want to include a positive interchange when he or she was already "on a roll" with negative interchanges? Also, if this passage were added later it would also happen that there would exist some manuscripts of the passage without the addition. This did not happen: the text is universally handed down as it is. It is more likely that passage represents some real interchanges of Jesus with mostly hostile scribes, but, there is one interchange that was refreshingly positive. We will also see some important connections in further sections. While the scribe in Mark 12:28-34 is in some sense, anomalous, there is no reason to

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<sup>17</sup> Malina, A. *Non Come Gli Scribi: Studio del loro ruolo nel vangelo di Marco*. Abstract of a Doctoral Thesis in the Department of Scripture of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 2001, p. 7-70.

jump to the conclusion that the passage stems from a different hand or source. In this case and in this case alone Jesus and the scribe have a mutual respect for each other and Jesus recognizes that the scribe is not far from the kingdom. But the scribe does not fully recognize that the kingdom is already present in Jesus as we will see in section 3 below.<sup>18</sup> Even if the episode that we are studying was from a form critical point of view conflated into the gospel, it is still legitimate. The final “conflator” had one unifying thought in mind after all.

## 2.2 Redaction Criticism

The next step is to determine why Mark did that. This is the job of redaction criticism. Redaction Criticism is the attempt to determine what was on the gospel writer’s mind when he put the various forms together. It is not a new invention, but rather a natural development of source criticism and form criticism.<sup>19</sup> One may say that form criticism and redaction criticism are opposite sides of the coin. The form critics look at the passage from the point of view of the parts of the passage. The redaction critics look at the passage from the point of view of the author. Looking at the gospels from a redaction critic’s point of view would show that the life situation of

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<sup>18</sup> McIlhone, J. *Not Far From the Kingdom: A Scribe in Mark*. Chicago Studies 34 (1, 1995) pp.53-62.

<sup>19</sup> Smalley, Stephen S. “Redaction Criticism” in *The New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, Marshall, I. Howard, ed. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977, p. 181ss.

the author was the primary determinant of what a writer would do to the pre-existing stories or apothegms. This study would show that the gospel would be more a history of the evangelist, his times, and his problems rather than a biography of Jesus. The redactor critics use various techniques to determine what the gospel writer's purpose was. They depend on the source critics and the form critics to tease out what the pre-Markan elements may be; but then they see what Mark did with those elements to serve his purpose. McIlhone points out that they use two main tools, emendation analysis and composition analysis.<sup>20</sup> In emendation analysis, we try to see how authors modify the material they use. In composition analysis, we look at the choice of the material, the arrangement of the material and the omission of any material. By examining these elements we can see the theological bent and purpose of the writer. During our close reading of the passage, we will utilize these techniques. We will especially treat the scribe precisely as a scribe and not as a disciple; just as Reis recognized the witch as a witch and not a sycophant of Saul.

One technique that we will not utilize is the statistical analysis of James P. McIlhone in his superb Ph.D. thesis.<sup>21</sup> McIlhone, in addition to trying to do redaction criticism in the traditional way by comparison of

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<sup>20</sup> McIlhone, JP, *op. cit.*, (*Not Far From the Kingdom*), p. 49ss.

<sup>21</sup> McIlhone, JP, "*The Lord Your God is One: A Redaction Critical Analysis of Mark 12: 28-34*". Ph.D. thesis, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1987. Hereafter "*Diss*".

manuscripts, also tries to do a mathematical analysis of the text using statistical methods.<sup>22</sup> He tries to determine whether or not a particular word is characteristic of the author by seeing if the word was used intentionally or simply by random chance. For example, take the word “*kai*.” This word for “and” is used in the synoptic gospels 2,838 times. By various mathematical prestidigitations, McIlhone determines that in Mark a statistician would expect that the word *kai* be used 823 times. However, in fact it is used 1,024 times in Mark. He concludes, therefore, that the use of *kai* is not merely by chance but indeed a habit of Mark himself, and can therefore be hypothesized to be a mark of Mark. This is indeed very avant-garde and scientific. But other scripture scholars have already come to that conclusion without the heavy mathematical machinery of statistics! McIlhone has made a significant contribution to scripture study by his painstaking and thorough statistical analysis of many words in Mark, and it bears considerable weight. However, the statistical analysis of language suffers in that words are not completely random choices. The use of “standard deviation” as a tool to determine if a word is used by chance or intention presumes that word usage is distributed on a bell-shaped curve. This presumption is never verified in McIlhone’s work. There are many sets of data that do not exist on a bell-

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<sup>22</sup> McIlhone, *Diss*, p. 88 forward.

shaped curve, and so, the use of standard deviation as a test falls short. There are only a few words in Greek that can be used for “and.” If an author gets into the habit of using one particular choice, that is explainable and useful even without statistics. Furthermore, McIlhone states that his thesis is an exercise in redaction criticism. The purely mathematical analysis of the frequency of use of words does not fall into that hermeneutical enterprise.

### 2.3 The “Text-Grammar” Reading of Wolfgang Oswald

Wolfgang Oswald is a professor of New Testament in the Evangelical (Protestant) Theology Faculty at Tübingen. He analyzes texts semiotically, breaking them up into “*ausserungseinheiten*,” or “elocution units.” He recognizes that human conversations are based on thoughts that are put forth in bits that might not correspond to sentences. Most interpreters take one sentence at a time. Oswald thinks that you need to look at each elocution unit, or thought, and see how it serves the purpose of the speaker. For instance, if a speaker is being ironic, the elocution unit would be interpreted in a different way than if the speaker were being factual.<sup>23</sup> Oswald breaks up our passage as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> Oswald, W. “Das Gespräch zwischen Jesus und einem Schriftgelehrten” in *Biblische Notizen*, 75, 1994, pp. 82-100. Beware: the language in this German journal article is extremely difficult. I had several people try to translate the article for me and in the end I emailed Professor Oswald for clarification. For example, the translation of “*ausserungseinheit*” as “elocution unit” was his suggestion. (Email of 5/25/2008 from

- 12.28a And one of the scribes approaching  
 12.28b a listener as disputant  
 12.28c seeing  
 12.28d that He had answered them well  
 12.28e he asked him  
 12.28f Which commandment is the first among all?  
 12.29a Jesus answered  
 12.29b The first is  
 12.29c Listen  
 12.29d Israel  
 12.29e the Lord our God is Lord  
 12.30a and you should love the Lord your God with all  
 your heart and soul and mind and strength  
 12.31a The second is this  
 12.31b You should love your neighbor as yourself  
 12.31c A greater than this one commandment does not  
 exist  
 12.32a and the Scribe said to Him  
 12.32b Good  
 12.32c teacher  
 12.32d you have spoken in conformity with truth  
 12.32e that He is one  
 12.32f and there is no other but He  
 12.33a and to love Him with the whole heart, and  
 judgment and strength  
 12.33b and to love the neighbor as oneself  
 12.33c is more than all holocausts and sacrifices  
 12.34a And Jesus seeing  
 12.34b that he answered intelligently  
 12.34c said to him  
 12.34d You are not far from the kingdom of God  
 12.34e And no one dared to ask Him anymore

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[wolfgang.oswald@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:wolfgang.oswald@uni-tuebingen.de)). Hereafter, “*Gesprach*.” If a reader is courageous enough to try to understand this German they are to be praised. There is an article written in English that explains Oswald’s methodology: Oswald, W. “Text Segmentation and Pragmatics” in *Actes du Quatrieme Colloque International ‘Bible et Informatique.’* Amsterdam, 15-18 August 1994 or Paris-Geneva, 1995. Pp. 140-152.

Oswald feels that breaking the passage up into individual thoughts yields an understanding of turning points in the passage and we will see later that this may have some important ramifications. However, a cursory glance at the above paradigm will show that the arrangement is somewhat arbitrary.

Would one get a completely different interpretation if one were to break it up differently? We will be especially interested in the last line, the observation that further dialogue with Christ is impossible.

#### 2.4 Narrative Criticism

The final interpretive lens that has been used to scrutinize the gospel is that of narrative criticism. The narrative critic studies the gospel as a complete unit and through global appreciation seeks to discover the “theme and meaning in an entire literary unit<sup>24</sup>.” McIlhone summarizes the work of Rhoads, Mitchie, Kelber and Kingsbury as they sought to understand the purposes and program of Mark. All of these scholars tried to discover a purpose in the writing of the gospel by analyzing setting, plot and characters. They came to such conclusions as Mark’s intention to tell a story, or to build Jesus’ ministry around a geographical setting, or to develop a Christology based on the messianic secret, or to analyze the titles of Jesus. All of these

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<sup>24</sup> McIlhone, JP, *Diss*, p. 38ss.

narrative critical attempts are somewhat helpful to understanding the Gospel, but they depend on and interface with source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism. We ourselves in this thesis will follow the example of Pamela Tamarkin Reis, as previously mentioned. She seems to have a methodology that does not come to the text with preconceived notions. Let us begin looking at the text of Mark 12: 28-34.

## Part Three: A Close Reading

### 3.1 The Entrance of the Scribe, Mark 12:28

The passage begins with the Greek word *kai*, “and.” In the text of Mark, there are 9,591 words and 1,024 of them are *kai*, or over 10% of the total.<sup>25</sup> McIlhone has recounted the history of the hermeneutic of this phenomenon and reports that at one time it was thought that the repeated use of *kai* was a sign of Semitic origin. As early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars decided that this was not the case; instead, it was the result of an amateur writer’s naiveté. Mark was no fool but neither was he highly educated and his simple, straightforward prose betrayed this. There are about 88 “sections” in Mark and 80 begin with *kai*. If anything, this is a good indication that it was indeed the same writer who put all this together and there is some indication that our section was not the work of a later hand.

McIlhone calls this Markan phenomenon “*Kai Parataxis*.” Indeed this is a bit of a misnomer. Webster’s says that “parataxis” as a literary word means the placing of related clauses beside one another without the use of connecting words or phrases. An example of this is “I came, I saw, I

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<sup>25</sup> McIlhone, *Diss.*, p. 70.

conquered.” In Mark we have the use of “*kai*” precisely as a connecting word. This would more properly be called hypotaxis by English purists. In any event, the use of *kai* signals the hand of Mark. It is interesting to note that Matthew and Luke, as they use Mark’s material, change *kai* to less rustic and more elegant Greek words such as *de* or *tote* around 140 times!<sup>26</sup> The very first word of our pericope seems to indicate that what follows comes from Mark himself and that it forms a definite part of his gospel.

McIlhorne<sup>27</sup> says that the next part of the verse is one of Mark’s favorite constructions, a series of participles: having come, having heard, and having seen. The participles strengthen the tie to what went on in earlier verses. The participles refer to the subject *heis ton gramateon*, “one of the scribes.” The scribe asks which is the most important of all the commandments. Note that it is a scribe that asks the question. A scribe was a recognized expert in the law.<sup>28</sup> We cannot assume that it is of no consequence that Mark has this interchange choreographed with a scribe. It was important to Mark that the dialogue be exercised with a scribe and not just with any passerby. The scribes were Jewish leaders who exercised their influence up to the destruction of the Jewish state by Titus in AD 70. In

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<sup>26</sup> McIlhorne, *Diss.*, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> McIlhorne, *Diss.*, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Gingrich, F. Wilbur and Danker, Frederick William, eds.. *A Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Second edition, University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 41.

Hebrew they were called *soferim* and their original job was to be clerks, or perhaps what we would call notaries. In religious circles they copied sacred manuscripts and vouched for their authenticity. They exercised a secular function, too: there were scribes who copied, disseminated and vouched for the authenticity of governmental decrees and civil contracts. In the sacred arena, their function grew and developed so that they were not mere clerks but what the British might call solicitors. They taught the law, interpreted it, and helped people to resolve differences based on jurisprudential principles. The scribes were well-respected professionals at the time of Christ.<sup>29</sup> Jesus Christ Himself describes how the scribes have become well-respected when He said that the scribes and Pharisees have “taken their place on the chair of Moses.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus asks His disciples to obey them, but this is not a fully enthusiastic endorsement of their authority. The past tense “*have taken*” may indicate that their authority is coming to an end. The rest of the chapter shows how their actions do not correspond to their words. But nevertheless, they have some validation from Christ. Together with the priests, Sadducees and Pharisees, the scribes were the elite class of the time and some were even members of the authoritative Sanhedrin.<sup>31</sup> The Scribes were respected

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<sup>29</sup> Legasse, S. “Scribes et disciples de Jesus,” *Revue Biblique* 68 (1961) 321-345 and 481-505.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 23:1

<sup>31</sup> Klijn, A.F.J. “Scribes, Pharisees, High Priests and Elders in the New Testament,” *Novum Testamentum*, 3 (1959) 259-267.

because they were learned in the oral law, which would later be formulated as the Talmud. Their spiritual descendants are the rabbis.

In the Gospels, the scribes are consistently opposed to Jesus and His teaching and sometimes are even associated with the people that caused Jesus' death.<sup>32</sup> In the interchange of Mark 12:26ss that is our concern, the scribe is characterized in a rather positive light. We must appreciate the fact that Mark wishes to make a statement about Jesus and His attitude toward the law and His authority over the law. That is why Mark has the scribe play such an important role in this pericope.

It is remarkable that a recognized expert asks a question of Jesus, who in the eyes of the people around him was just an amateur. But we must remember that the Gospel of Mark is a faith document and since Mark wants to picture Jesus in a particular way *vis-à-vis* the Torah, it serves his purpose to have Jesus discussing the law with experts rather than amateurs.

Here we again touch upon the approach to the bible known as redaction criticism. As we said, if *form criticism* is concerned with different genera of literature in the bible, and the rules of interpretation that pertain to them, then *redaction criticism* is concerned with the way the particular piece of writing is made to serve the purposes of the author. Mark used this

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<sup>32</sup> Mark 2:6-7; Mark 11:27-28; Luke 5:21; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:66

particular example of a dialogue of Jesus for his own purpose and his own purpose will be made clear as we follow our close reading of this text.

Perhaps in our day and age, we might use the word “spin” instead of redaction. It is tremendously useful to be consciously aware of whatever “spin” in being put on a fact in order to really know what is going on in any arena!

Also, this particular question was not quite original with the scribe. It was a common topic of conversation among people studying the Law. At the time of Jesus Christ, there was a famous expert in the Torah named Hillel. He was not a Cohen or a Levi, nor was he an important personage. He was an ordinary Jew who became extraordinary because of his love of study and his piety and his congenial personality. There is a legend that says that every day he worked to earn two coins: one to support his family and one to go to the synagogue to study at night. One day, he had no work and therefore no money. Since the guard at the synagogue would not let him enter without paying, he climbed to the roof and went to the skylight so he could hear the words of the scholars. It was a Friday night in winter, and the snow fell on him. When the dawn came, one of the people in the synagogue noticed that the room was dark. They went to examine the skylight, and

found the half-frozen body of the young Hillel covered with snow on top of the skylight.

They rescued him, bathed him and placed him near the fire – acts not normally permitted on the Sabbath – because they said that he was such a pious man that he deserved that the Sabbath be violated on his behalf.

Within a few years, Hillel became a recognized leader in Judaism. There are many tales about how Jews and non-Jews alike would come to him and ask him about the essence of Judaism, in effect, “Which commandment is the greatest?” One version says that a gentile came up to him and asked “Tell us the most important commandments in the time that you can stand on one foot.” Hillel responded “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. The rest is commentary – now, go and study!” (Note that this love of neighbor will form the *second* part of Jesus’ own answer.) The point is that it was a common exercise to try to figure out the most important part of the law<sup>33</sup>. The scribes question then is not startling but common.

The question has parallels in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, our scribe addresses Jesus directly and asks “which is the greatest commandment of the Law?<sup>34</sup>” Matthew uses the Greek word *nomos*, which means “The Law” and is understood as the Torah. Mark on the other hand

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<sup>33</sup> Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and its History*. William Morrow & Co., NY, 1991, p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 22:36.

uses the word *entolay*, which means one of a set of rules. The difference between a law and a command is that the Law is backed up by a community and a tradition, while a command is backed up only by the person that gives it.<sup>35</sup> So, Mark asks “which is the first of all the commandments?”<sup>36</sup> and this could indicate a wider base than just the Torah. Perhaps Mark did not want to limit his thinking to the Jewish Law, since he was not writing for a primarily Jewish audience. Mark might be thinking of making his commentary open enough to include philosophical ethical axioms out of concern for his readers. Matthew as we know was addressing a strongly Jewish audience and therefore the Torah would have been more in mind. Mark was addressing a more culturally diverse group. “Commandments” might have been perceived as more culturally congruent. Oswald also points out that the Scribe does not particularly ask about the *Torah*.<sup>37</sup> Oswald says that even Jesus does not quote the *Torah* precisely as *Torah* but rather as a correct thought. In other words, Jesus is giving the value to the thought expressed and Jesus is not deriving its value since it is *Torah*. In any case, the lack of the term *nomos* throughout Mark shows that “in the Markan Church, the law was no longer relevant in cultic regulation but only as a

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<sup>35</sup> Louw, Johannes P. and Nida, Eugene A., eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. United Bible Societies, New York, 1989, #33.330.

<sup>36</sup> Mark 12:28.

<sup>37</sup> Oswald, W. *Gesprach*, p. 86.

moral law.<sup>38</sup> Here, the double commandment that Jesus fashioned constitutes the culmination of the conversation between Jesus and the Jews.

In the parallel passage in Luke, the question takes on an entirely different tone. A lawyer approaches Jesus and asks “what must I do to earn eternal life?<sup>39</sup>” Jesus in effect says “what do you think?” The lawyer responds with the same response that Jesus gave in the other two Gospels, love God and love your neighbor.

### 3.2 Jesus’ Answer, Mark 12:29

It is noteworthy that Jesus immediately answers the scribe’s question. In the culture of Jesus’ time, when theological discussions were taking place, it would be far more likely for a Jew to respond to a question with another question. (Even today, people remark at the proclivity of Jews to answer a question with another question. When asked why Jews do that, a good Jew answered, “Why not?”) And very few questions in the Jewish culture of the Middle East at the time of Christ were honest requests for information. Asking the question was a common ploy for shaming others. The desired outcome, of course, is that the one who is questioned will not know the answer and therefore be shamed in front of others.

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<sup>38</sup> Schnelle, U. *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*. Fortress Publishers, Augsburg, Germany, 1998, p. 203.

<sup>39</sup> Luke 10:25.

Honor and shame are core cultural values in the Mediterranean world, both at the time of Jesus and also in our own time. John Pilch, an astute expert in the culture of the Middle East, points out that the notions of honor and shame permeate the Bible. Here is a clear example of how questioning can lead to preserving one's own honor and bring about the shame of others. The whole context of this passage is the interchanges of the hostile scribes and Jesus and this is the perfect example of Pilch's thesis.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus' usual defense when asked a baiting question was indeed to reply with another question. In the scriptures, Jesus usually is portrayed as quite clever in silencing His opponents and of course this led ultimately to the disaster of the crucifixion.<sup>41</sup> But here Jesus immediately responds to the question. This reinforces the notion that this particular interchange is a friendly dialogue and Jesus recognizes in some way the sincerity of the questioner, even if it is in the midst of several hostile encounters.

### 3.3 The Conjunction and the Change, Mark 12: 30

When Jesus answers the scribe's question, Jesus does three new things. First, he conjoins two commandments from the Old Testament, the command to love God and love one's neighbor. Although only asked for

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<sup>40</sup> Pilch, John J. *The Cultural Dictionary of the Bible*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Pilch, John J. *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

one commandment, Jesus adds a second. He adds the command to love one's neighbor to the command to love God. Jesus adds Leviticus 19:18 to Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This is an original theological move on the part of Jesus.<sup>42</sup> And even if it is an original idea on Jesus' part it begins a development and trajectory that goes throughout the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> The two commandments form a unity as the 'first of all of the commands,' but they do not meld into each other. The first remains first, and the second remains second, but there is no other command greater than these.<sup>44</sup> In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 are not related or conjoined in any way. They are far apart from each other in the Pentateuch and were never quoted in tandem. The entire atmosphere that they exude in our pericope must be from the unique construction of Jesus Himself.<sup>45</sup> &<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Brown, Raymond E. et. al.. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990, 41:78.

<sup>43</sup> The trajectory receives its culmination in the writings of Paul. In Romans 13:8-10, Paul explicitly quotes this idea of Jesus. Now Paul was an expert in the Law and his appreciation of Jesus' twist should signal the realization that Jesus exercised authority and power in conjoining the commandments. In Galatians 6:2 Paul actually ascribes to Jesus the right to give a law when he says that in bearing one another's burdens, we will fulfill the law of Christ. There is an interesting study that points out that the Qumran Essene Sect also joined these two commandments together. Could the Essenes have followed Jesus' lead? Or could it be that Qumran and Jesus had a common source other than Christ? That hypothetical source has never been found either in itself or quoted by another. Cf. an article written in Aramaic and hence inaccessible to this author: Ruzer, S. "The Double Love Precept in the New Testament and in *The Rule of the Congregation*" in *Tarbiz*, Jerusalem, 71:3-4, 2002, pp. 353-370.

<sup>44</sup> Mark 12:28 and 31.

<sup>45</sup> Keerankeri, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>46</sup> Folkers, H. *Wahrheit in Person*. "Gottesliebe und Nächstenliebe sind Unteilbar" in *Evangelische Kommentare*, Stuttgart, 29(1, 1996) pp. 27-29. Folkers confirms that the conjunction of Deut 6 and Lev 19 is a theological novelty in Mk 12:28-34.

Second, He joins the first commandment, to love God, with the *Shema Israel*, the important Jewish prayer/profession of faith that is recited every day. We shall investigate the *Shema* below in section 1.2.3.2.

Third, Jesus changes the text of the *Shema*. This change shows that Jesus had something in His self-consciousness that impelled Him to take an authoritative stand *vis-à-vis* the text. We will examine this change more closely below in section 1.2.3.3.. It will then be important to see how the scribe reacts to this change of the text.

### 3.4 The *Shema*

Two or four times a day, depending on how you count, a pious Jew recited the *Shema*. The *Shema* is not a prayer. It is instead a profession of faith, a “catechism” if you will. The *Shema* affirms the unity of God, reminds the one reciting of the obligations of a pious Jew, recalls the signs of the Covenant, and cautions against turning astray from the One God. Pious Jews try to die with the *Shema* on their lips.<sup>47</sup> The entire *Shema* comes from the *Torah*: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, Deuteronomy 11: 13-21 and Numbers 15: 37-41. In Mark 12: 29, Jesus quotes only Deuteronomy 6: 4-5, the first phrase of the *Shema*.

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<sup>47</sup> Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to know about the Jewish Religion, its People and its History*. William Morrow and Company, New York, pp. 144, 149, 214, 556, 633, 650, 667-668.

Pope Benedict XVI explains that the recitation of this formula “was understood as the act of taking on one’s shoulders the yoke of God’s sovereign lordship. This prayer is not just a matter of words: the one who prays it accepts God’s lordship, which, consequently, through the act of praying, enters the world. The one who is praying helps to bear it on his shoulders, and through his prayer, God’s lordship shapes his way of life, his day-to-day existence, making it a locus of God’s presence in the world<sup>48</sup>

This profession of faith was very sacred to Jews and Jews did not take it lightly. This is true because it comes from the *Torah* itself, the very Word of God to Jews. Remember that Jews believe that God Himself gave the *Torah* to Moses and Moses’ most important task was to convey the *Torah* to the Israelites. In this thesis we will be interested in the fact that that Jesus changes the words of the passage. He **adds** the words “with all your mind” to the three faculties already listed in the *Shema*, all your heart, soul and strength. Jesus in this instance disobeys the precept to never change a word of the *Torah*! We will examine the text of the *Shema* carefully and see how Jesus alters it and how the Scribe responds and what Jesus thinks of the Scribe’s response.

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<sup>48</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph (Pope Benedict XVI). *Jesus of Nazareth*. Doubleday, New York and London, 2007, p. 57.

We limit ourselves to the text of Deuteronomy 6, verse 5, in the form received as the Septuagint, or LXX: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” Note that three faculties are named. The first, “heart” is the Hebrew word *Leb*. In the bible, psychological activity is usually associated with various organs of the body. The organ most frequently mentioned is the heart. Ancient people may have been unaware of the true physiological functioning of the heart but they recognized it as emotionally engaged. The heart signifies in some sense the whole person but especially under the aspect of will, desire, emotion and decision.<sup>49</sup> The Hebrew word *Leb* is possibly derived from a root word meaning “agitated motion,” and refers to the inner ability of a person to act with the action stemming from will and intellect together.<sup>50</sup> As the bodily focus of emotional activity, the heart is glad or cheerful (Judges 18: 20; Proverbs 15: 13), experiences spiritual exultation (I Samuel 1: 8), feels grief or sadness (1 Samuel 1: 8) and a host of all conceivable emotions. The heart is used in the bible where we would use “mind” or “will.”<sup>51</sup> It does emphasize the affective more than the intellectual.<sup>52</sup> In 1 Samuel 16:7 the word refers specifically to the invisible inner person: “mortals look at

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<sup>49</sup> McKenzie, John L., SJ. *Dictionary of the Bible*. Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1965. P. 344.

<sup>50</sup> Tresmontant, C. *A Study of Hebrew Thought*. M.F. Gibson, translator, New York, 1960, pp. 83-124

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, *Loc. Cit.*.

<sup>52</sup> Baungartel, F. *theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. III, 605-607.

appearances, but God beholds the heart.” This idea of the inner person being the real person may be of Greek influence. Certainly, at the time of Christ, it would be hard to tease out Greek versus Hebrew elements from the culture. They were quite well intermingled. Heart even has an intellectual dimension, for example, in Numbers 16: 28 the heart is the source of thought: “Moses said ‘This is how you shall know that it was the LORD who sent me to do all I have done, and that it was not *from my heart*.’” The “not from my heart” means “not from any scheming of my own.”

Tresmontant claims that the word *Leb* is used less often to signify the emotions. Emotions are passing things, inspired by sometimes ephemeral realities. The “heart” of a person is a seat of knowledgeable and willful and committed personality formation. It is a perduring and stable posture that a person assumes and so it is constitutive of their very person.<sup>53</sup>

The second, “soul,” is the Hebrew word *Nefesh*. This too refers to another part of the physical body, the throat or neck, but refers most of all to “breath.” Psalm 68:2 is often translated as “the waters threaten my life” but it literally means “the waters come up to my *nefesh* (neck).” Since in Semitic, first-century anthropology the act of breathing is what distinguishes the living from the dead, *Nefesh* could mean “individual life.” The word is

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<sup>53</sup> Tresmontant, C. *Loc. Cit.*

used in regard to the life of both animals and humans. The *Nefesh* might be translated as soul, especially meaning that which makes a human being alive. However, the word “soul” carries with it a load of baggage from Greek philosophy through medieval scholasticism through the magisterium of the Church. This Hellenistic and/or ecclesiastical development of “soul” means a pure spiritual principle more or less distinct from the body or at least from the corporeal aspect of a human’s existence. The Hebrew *Nefesh* involves absolutely none of these ideas. *Nefesh* to the Hebrew meant vital principle. This vital principle was a direct gift of God (Genesis 2: 7) but it was not a reality distinct from the body or indwelling the body. However, after death, the *Nefesh* goes to *Sheol*. This is a place of unfeeling, shadowy existence. Many psalms plead for the rescue of one’s *nefesh* from death, not in the sense of a resurrection from the dead but rather a saving from dying. Although the Israelite mentality would not foster a dichotomy between body and soul and the Israelite saw human beings as concrete totalities, *Nefesh* does have some distinct existence apart from the flesh that returns to the earth from which it was made. Perhaps it might be best translated as “Ego.”<sup>54</sup> As the “I,” *nefesh* performs all the activities of human daily living. The *nefesh* hungers, thirsts, hopes, longs, loves and hates.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 837.

The third word, “might,” is the Hebrew word *Meod*. This means “power” or “might.” It carries the idea of “all possible power” since the word “*Meod*” can also transmute into the adverb “very” (Cf. Genesis 1: 31, “and God saw that all He made was “*very* good”). The English “with all your might” is quite representative. Note that all three of the words form a pleonastic construction to denote the whole human being, especially in affective and volitional aspects.<sup>55</sup> It is *less intellectual* since Judaism is a religion of ethics more than intellect.

Using three words to denote the totality of the person underlines the complete and total submission that must be given to the Godhead. The fact that *Shema* begins with the command to “Listen” or “Hear” shows that it is a didactic formula that demands an attitude of obedience; the Jews indeed thought of it as the very word of God.<sup>56</sup> As the Word of God, it would command the utmost of respect and the community would not take easily to changing its text.

The *Shema* is in fact a highly conserved, stable, and guarded text. There has only been found one variant of the text. Justin Martyr was one of the second century Greek apologists. He lived in Palestine and was part of a

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<sup>55</sup> Holladay, W.L., ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Based upon the Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner*. Brill Academic Publishers, 1997. Articles 4008, 5633, and 4184.

<sup>56</sup> Christensen, D.L. *Deuteronomy 1 11*, World Biblical Commentary, 6A, Dallas, Texas, 1991.

pagan Greek family until he converted to Christianity. He was eventually martyred under the prefect of the city Junius Rusticus in 165 AD. Justin wrote the *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* and it exists in a single manuscript from the year 1364 AD.<sup>57</sup> This long dialogue gives an account of a two days' conversation with a learned Jew. During his disputation with Trypho, Justin quotes the *Shema* in a variant form that is found in no other place in all of Jewish literature.<sup>58</sup> Justin uses just two Greek words, *kardias* and *isxus*, heart and strength. Since Justin was a pagan and presumably not well versed in Jewish lore, it is highly probable that Justin simply misquoted the Jewish writings. Since Justin wrote in the second century AD, he wrote before the Masoretic text of the Old Testament saw the light. Justin's only source for the *Shema* would have to have been the LXX, which came into being in the third century BC. The LXX uses the three words that we have elucidated above. So does the Masoretic Text.

Another important and ancient corroboration of the consistency of the wording of the *Shema* would be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1961, Pierre Benoit published some texts from one of the Dead Sea discoveries from a place called Wadi Murabba'at that included the complete text of a

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<sup>57</sup> Altaner, Berthold. *Patrology*. Herder & Herder, New York, 1961, p.122.

<sup>58</sup> Shedinger, Robert F.. "A Note on the Variant Form of the *Shema* in the Writings of Justin Martyr," in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 93:2, 2000, pp.161-163.

phylactery which of course contains the entire *Shema*.<sup>59</sup> Later, another phylactery was found in Cave 4 and published as 4Q130(4QPhylC).<sup>60</sup> Both these phylacteries use the three conventional words that we have studied. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls were “frozen” before the end of the first century, they are sterling witnesses to the text as it must have been used around the time of Jesus and before. The LXX, the Masoretic Text, and all significant other sources use the three words that we have elucidated above. **Jesus seems to be the only person to have changed or attempted to change the *Shema*.**

### 3.5 By What Authority Does Jesus Change the Text?

Jesus quotes the already venerable text of the *Shema* to the scribe. But Jesus adds something. Jesus adds “with all your mind” to the three nouns of dedication already listed. It has occurred to this writer that very little has been made about this change in the text of a highly-conserved Jewish prayer. The *Jerome Biblical Commentary*<sup>61</sup> does not even mention that a fourth item has been added by Jesus! This writer has been able to find

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<sup>59</sup> Benoit, Pierre; Milik, J.T. and deVaux, Roland. “Les Grottes de Murabba’at,” in *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, 2, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961, p. 85.

<sup>60</sup> Milik, J.T. “Qumran Grotto 4” in *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, 6, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, R.E. *et. al.*, eds. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1968, #42:73. The second edition of this venerable book, the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990, # 41:79 takes note that four words are used but makes no mention whatever of the fact that Jesus added a word and changed the text of the Mosaic prayer.

only one person who has noticed and commented on this major change. G. J. Hamilton in an article published in 1988 recognized that Jesus' addition of "with all your mind" portrayed Jesus as the ultimate interpreter of Jewish scripture and emphasizes that fact that there is an intellectual dimension to Christian life<sup>62</sup>. Hamilton simply makes mention of this and does not analyze it in a critical and thorough way. McIlhorne notes that Mark used four words and has found one ancient manuscript (Dt LXX B P963) that used the word *dianoia*.<sup>63</sup> He thinks that Mark simply used the four terms since Mark had several versions of the text in front of him and decided to use all possible words. Why would Mark do that? In no other place in the gospel does Mark conflate variant readings from his sources! The far more likely explanation is that Jesus used the four words, and Mark simply quotes Him. And the fact that Jesus actually had the nerve to change this text points to the fact that He had a unique self-image. He had to have thought that He was at least equal to Moses, the supreme lawgiver. Is Jesus a new Moses?

The idea of Jesus being the fulfillment of the Old Testament and specifically the New Moses is one that has been recognized especially in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew has been traditionally recognized as Jewish-

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<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, G.J., "The First Commandment: A Theological reflection," in *New Blackfriars*, 69 (815, 1988) pp. 174-181.

<sup>63</sup> McIlhorne, *Diss.*, p. 126.

Christian in outlook<sup>64</sup> and Benedict Viviano points out that Matthew has special uses for the Old Testament in portraying Christ. Traditionally, the Gospel of Matthew has been consistently understood as Jewish-Christian, and even if the Jews of the community that Matthew addressed were excommunicated through the ban of *birkut hamminum* it is still clear that the community was Jewish in outlook.<sup>65</sup> Scholars have found as many as a dozen quotations of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Matthew introduced by a quotation like “This happened to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet...” or some such formula.<sup>66</sup> In Matthew, there are many presentations of Jesus as the new Moses. For example, just as Pharaoh killed all the baby boys of the Hebrews and only Moses was saved, so also Herod kills all the baby boys and only Jesus is saved.<sup>67</sup> When Moses’ life is in danger he flees from Egypt to Israel, but returns to Egypt after some time, so also when Jesus’ life is in danger, He takes the opposite journey from Israel to Egypt and then back to Israel.<sup>68</sup> Just as Moses goes up to the mountain to receive the Law from God, so Jesus teaches the new Law to the people from the Mountain.<sup>69</sup> Just as Moses fasted for forty days, so Jesus

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<sup>64</sup> Viviano, Benedict T., OP, *The Gospel According to Matthew in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Raymond E. Brown, SS, ed., Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, p. 630.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 631.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 632.

<sup>67</sup> Exodus 1:22 to 2:10 and Matthew 2: 13-18.

<sup>68</sup> Exodus 2: 15 and Matthew 2: 13-21.

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 19: 3 and Matthew 5: 1.

fasted for forty days.<sup>70</sup> Just as Moses was revered as the writer of the five books of the *Torah*, so Jesus' solemn teaching is contained in five discourses in Matthew.<sup>71</sup> Matthew explicitly wants to paint Jesus as the new Moses. Mark's Gospel may report the same things as Matthew, but since Mark was not writing for a Jewish audience, *his purpose was not to explicitly portray Jesus as the New Moses*. Matthew, on the other hand, being written later than Mark and also being dependant on Mark, used episodes from Jesus' life to describe Jesus in "higher" Christological terms than Mark.<sup>72</sup> But how much of this was inferred by Matthew and how much was implied by Mark? It seems to this author that the idea of Jesus as the new Moses was not, in fact, absent in Mark. If Mark did not consciously try to portray Jesus as a new Moses, then he was simply reporting what happened. This makes Mark even more reliable as a reporter. In fact, if Jesus had the audacity to change the words of the *Shema* could it not be possible that Jesus saw Himself as the new Moses and, in fact, as even more important than Moses? In the past generation, much has been said about finding the actual words of Christ, the *ipsissima verba*. It is notoriously difficult to do this. But perhaps we have here the *ipsissima cogitatio* of Jesus. By this term I mean the behavior, personality, conduct, self-image and gut-feelings of Jesus Himself. Jesus'

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<sup>70</sup> Exodus 34: 28 and Matthew 4:2

<sup>71</sup> Found in Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 22-25.

<sup>72</sup> Collins, Raymond F. *Introduction to the New Testament*. Doubleday & Co., New York, p. 262.

portrayal of Himself as the New Moses in the Gospel of Mark was not part of Mark's project. By reporting Jesus' actions and words aside from an agenda or redactional purpose, he might communicate to us the very thought of Jesus himself. Mark's "project" was to portray Jesus in relation to the Kingdom, not the Law. But Mark in fact reported Jesus as thinking He was the first-class interpreter and refiner of the Law. Mark did this almost without realizing he was doing it and therefore it possibly enjoys more historicity and conveys the *ipsissima cogitatio* of Christ without that much conscious redactional machinery.

### 3.6 The Answer of the Scribe, Mark 12:32-33

It is often said that Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus as having more hostility toward scribes than the other Gospels. We have seen that the interchange in Mark 12: 28 is unusual since this is the one time in the New Testament that Jesus and a scribe completely agree. The Scribe enthusiastically endorses Jesus' answer and the Greek of Mark 12:32 supports this completely. Furthermore, the Scribe paraphrases and repeats what Jesus has taught. This is the only time in the Gospels that someone repeats what Jesus has said! Note that when the Scribe repeats the teaching of Jesus, he repeats two of the four words that Jesus used: heart and might.

He then adds a third, *synesis*, which is neither in the original *Shema* nor in the words of Jesus. This Greek work means the faculty of intelligence, comprehension and shrewdness.<sup>73</sup> Look carefully at what the Scribe has done. The Scribe has done two things. He has (1) recognized Jesus' authority to change the Jewish prayer. Where Jesus added a component to the prayer that emphasized the intellectual dimension of the total dedication of the person to God, the Scribe accepted this nuanced change in emphasis. Then he (2) reformulated it in another way so that the tripartite division remained and yet the new intellectual dimension was preserved.

It were as if the Scribe just could not bear to hear four elements in the *Shema*, since he had always recited it with three elements. Yet the Scribe recognized the rightness of Jesus' interpretation and came up with a way to render the Hebrew "soul" in such a way that it would carry the intellectual component that Jesus added. The original *Shema* uses three terms: "heart," "soul," and "might." Jesus used four terms: "heart," "soul," "strength (with an intellectual dimension)," and "might." The Scribe reverted to three terms, "heart," "human faculty of intelligence," and "might." But even though he reverted to three terms, the scribe at least partially acceded to Jesus' change and used a word that combined "soul" and "strength,

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<sup>73</sup> Gingrich, *Op. Cit.*

especially in intellect.” The word that the scribe used was *synesis*: this, as has been said, means the faculty of comprehension, intelligence and shrewdness. This is the only use of the word in the Gospel of Mark. Could this mean that Mark was faithfully reporting the episode? In other parts of the bible it carries the meaning of understanding or what is understood. For example, in Ephesians 3:4, Paul says “you can perceive what I understand about the mystery of Christ.” The usage in this sentence means a “flowing together” as the joining of two rivers. It conveys what we might colloquially describe today as “what I’ve gotten my head around” or “what I’ve been able to get together.” In Luke 2:47, the word is used of the child Jesus’ remarkable faculty of understanding as He disputed with the scribes in the temple. It is used in the sense of people marveling at the child’s ability to “get things together<sup>74</sup>.” It is the opinion of this author that the crux of this interchange between Jesus and the Scribe is the fact that after Jesus had the boldness to change the three terms of the *shema* into four terms, the scribe at least partially accepted Jesus’ decision to make this change. The Scribe accepted the idea of Jesus to add a dimension of understanding, but then used a different word, *synesis*, implicitly acceding to or recognizing Jesus’ authority over the words of Jewish prayer but

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<sup>74</sup> Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Electronic edition, International Bible Translators, Inc. , 2000. #5084.

“correcting” it for better prosody. The fact that the Scribe only used three words is significant. Perhaps he just couldn’t get used to saying the prayer with four terms instead of three! Or, could it be that the Scribe buys into the process that Jesus is initiating and acts like an editor following the plan laid out by Jesus? He could have recognized the nuance that Jesus added, and then refashioned the words so that they fit the tripartite scheme. It would be as if the scribe said “Your point is well taken: there should be an intellectual dimension here. Let’s go with that new idea but keep three words so that people will accept it more readily.” Note carefully that in doing these things the Scribe is acting precisely as a scribe should act. He is performing his job as an editor, a linguistic expert and a wordsmith. He is not really being a disciple of Jesus. He is acting like a hired editor.

Our Scribe then points out that the love of God and neighbor is more valuable than any holocaust or sacrifice.<sup>75</sup> The Scribe uses the word *plasion*, meaning “neighbor” or “one close at hand.”<sup>76</sup> The word does not mean countryman or fellow Israelite but rather the person that happens to be there. It is exactly the same word for neighbor that Jesus used.

There is a minor variation between the Western Greek text and the Byzantine text in this verse. In the western text, the scribe says that the dual

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<sup>75</sup> Mark 12:33.

<sup>76</sup> Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

love of God and neighbor is *perisoteron* or “more remarkable, more valuable” than burnt offerings or sacrifices.<sup>77</sup> In the Byzantine text, the word is *pleron*, meaning “more” or “further<sup>78</sup>.” This is a very insignificant textual variant that is not even mentioned in many commentaries and texts.<sup>79</sup> All sources agree on burnt-offerings and sacrifices, *holocaustometon* and *thousia*. These two words sum up the cultic and ritual elements of the Jewish enterprise. Here the scribe is echoing the words of many prophets that pointed out that worship must proceed from a pure heart that is steeped in covenant love. He does not condemn the sacrifices or rituals; he says that they must be subordinated to a heart that is open to obedience and faithfulness. This also echoes the sum and substance of Jesus’ own preaching and especially His interchanges in the context of Mark 12:28-34. This is another reason to think that the passage belongs right where it is and is not a later addition. Remember most of all that the Scribe is acting like a scribe and should not be scrutinized to see if he is becoming a disciple.

### 3.7 The Reaction of Jesus, Mark 12:34

The last verse of our pericope is Jesus’ response to the scribe and also a kind of editorial comment. Notice the “kai parataxis” or better, the “kai

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<sup>77</sup> Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p 157.

<sup>78</sup> Gingrich, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>79</sup> Take for example, Metzger, *op. cit.*.

hypotaxis.” Jesus is quite pleased with the Scribe’s response. Jesus observes, or sees, that the scribe answered “wisely.” The Greek word is *nounekos*, an adverb that means “wisely, with understanding, thoughtfully.” This word definitely refers to the ability to reason.<sup>80</sup> This word is, interestingly, a hapax legomenon in the New Testament. Not only is it an appreciative response to the scribe’s acceptance of Jesus as authorized to change the *Shema*, but it also underlines the change that Jesus made. Jesus added a word that highlighted the rational, intelligent element in true religion. The scribe accepted that change and actually intensified the word. Where Jesus had used *dianoias*, the scribe used *syneseos*. The scribe took the line of thought that Jesus was using and then used a word that was even more apropos to Jesus’ own thought process. Jesus was grateful for this editorial assistance and endorsed the scribe’s work. Then Jesus says in verse 34, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” This is a mysterious phrase. Let us think about the “Kingdom of God.”

First of all, let us look at the meaning of the Kingdom of God in Mark’s Gospel. In the Gospel of Mark, the principal function of Jesus the Christ is to both proclaim and bear the Kingdom. All aspects of His life and career must be understood in this paradigm. Mark 1: 14-15 provides a lens

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<sup>80</sup> Louw-Nida, *Op. Cit.*, 32.29.

through which we see the entire ministry of Jesus and is the key to Markan theology. In other parts of scripture, the “time has not arrived yet<sup>81</sup>” or perhaps it is “close at hand<sup>82</sup>” or perhaps it has “grown very short<sup>83</sup>.” But in Mark’s Gospel the coming of the Kingdom is an imminent event. In fact, the nearness of the Kingdom of God *was* the gospel!<sup>84</sup> The Kingdom has arrived in the very person of Jesus.<sup>85</sup> In Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom, repentance is not looked on as a prerequisite but rather an effect. The Kingdom of God has already arrived! Therefore, act as though you are in it. In Mark, Jesus has a very particular relation to the coming kingdom of God and Jesus is the operator of that kingdom. This would seem to be from the very preaching of Jesus. Most telling is the fact that Jesus decides who gets into the Kingdom of God. Remember that Jesus said that prostitutes and tax-collectors would enter the Kingdom before so-called righteous religious leaders. Jesus not only teaches the requirements but decides who fulfills those requirements.<sup>86</sup>

In reading Mark 12:28-34, our first reaction is that Jesus is talking about the law, the *Torah*. At least one scripture scholar thinks that in fact

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<sup>81</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5: 1

<sup>82</sup> Revelation 1: 3

<sup>83</sup> 1 Corinthians 7: 29

<sup>84</sup> Lane, William L. “Mark,” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1974, p. 63.

<sup>85</sup> Kelber, Werner H. *The Kingdom in Mark*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, pp. 1-15.

<sup>86</sup> Carson, D.A., “Matthew” in Gaebelin, F.A., ed., *the Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1984, p. 250.

the whole thrust of the pericope is more about the Kingdom than the law.

Eugene LaVerdiere examines the context of our pericope and finds that the real emphasis is not so much on the law than it is on the Kingdom.

LaVerdiere says that fulfilling the dual commandments (Mk 12:28-35) being worth more than all offerings and sacrifices is basically a repudiation of the cultic/legal structure of Judaism. Then in Mark 12:38-40, the teaching that the behavior of the scribes is to be avoided is a further repudiation. Finally, recognizing all peoples as chosen and loved by God (12:25-37) especially the poor and marginalized (12:41-44) is what really enables access to the Kingdom.<sup>87</sup>

McIlhone seems to agree with that assessment, and feels that the very reason the scribe is still at some distance from the Kingdom is precisely that he fails to see that the Kingdom is already present in Jesus.<sup>88</sup> (Does he fail to see it or does he want NOT to see it?)

It is interesting to note that after the resurrection of Christ, there seems to be a change in emphasis. After the resurrection, the early Church saw Jesus authority and legitimization coming from the resurrection and not from the connection to the Kingdom.<sup>89</sup> This stands to reason. After the

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<sup>87</sup> LaVerdiere, Eugene. "The First of All the Commandments: Jesus and the Scribes (Mark 12:28-34)," *Emmanuel* 101:4, 1995, pp. 223-232.

<sup>88</sup> McIlhone, J. *op.cit.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>89</sup> Gartner, Bertel. "The Person of Jesus and the Kingdom of God," in *Theology Today*, 27:1, April, 1970.

birth of the early Church as a community of people who hope for the resurrection, any thought of the “Kingdom of God” would be subsumed into the eschatological reality of the resurrection. Furthermore, as the Church became more gentile, Jewish conceptions such as the “Kingdom of God” would recede in importance. But since this is included here in the Gospel of Mark we can see that it must have formed part of Jesus’ teaching and self-image. Jesus had some kind of consciousness of being important in the bringing about of the kingdom. Perhaps this consciousness was hazy; perhaps it puzzled Jesus Himself. But Jesus was compelled to assume a posture of responsibility to proclaim the kingdom, to have a large part in effecting the Kingdom, and to speak on who gets into the Kingdom. Jesus telling the scribe that he is not far from the Kingdom points out that there is substantial agreement between Jesus and the scribe. But it also points out that there is room for a further development: not like a warning, but rather as a praising.

One scholar, Victor Furnish, claims that the phrase “not far” is a case of litotes<sup>90</sup>, a figure of speech in which an affirmative is expressed by denying a negative. For example, one could say that the Graduate Theological Foundation is “no insignificant organization.” This would

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<sup>90</sup> Furnish, Victor P., *The Love Command in the New Testament*. New York, 1972, section 12.

express a positive appreciation of the renown and importance of the school. Furnish says that it means the scribe is already there. However, nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus or anyone else claim that the Kingdom of God has been realized in any individual or organization. Not even the disciples of Jesus are already in the Kingdom.

Jesus is telling the scribe that he is on the way! And what is that way? Note very carefully that it is Jesus Himself. By accepting the thought process of Jesus, and by participating in that process by being Jesus' assistant wordsmith, the scribe shows that he is on the road to the Kingdom. The Scribe recognized something about the commanding presence of Jesus. This is the only time in the New Testament that a person is told he is not far from the Kingdom of God.

We must take the time to deeply appreciate the posture that the scribe has assumed. By accepting Jesus' line of thinking, by accepting Jesus' right to change the *Shema*, and by actually assisting Jesus in the formulation of words, the scribe is accepting Jesus as central and constitutive in the formation of the Kingdom.

In order to appreciate this posture, let us listen to a present-day "scribe," a rabbi, who also had a conversation with Jesus. In his recent

book, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*<sup>91</sup>, Jacob Neusner relates his imaginary dialogue with Jesus in order to explain why he remains a Jew. In the book, Neusner accompanies Jesus in the day-to-day preaching and at night goes to study *Torah* in the local synagogue. Neusner is fascinated by the words of Jesus and attracted by His personality and goodness. In a conversation with another rabbi at the local synagogue, Neusner reports the things that Jesus said and did. The local rabbi asks him what Jesus said about the *Torah*. Neusner reports that Jesus followed the basic Jewish interpretations, but not exactly. The rabbi says “what did he leave out?” Neusner responds “nothing.” The rabbi says “then what did he add?” Neusner responds “HIMSELF!” This is the critical spot at which Neusner retreats into remaining with the “eternal Israel” and no longer listens to Jesus. The particular words of Jesus that Neusner refers to is Matthew 19:21: “If you would be perfect, go and sell all you have and come and follow *me*.” For Jesus, the state of perfection, the state of being holy as God is holy, consists in following Jesus Himself. Neusner perceives the mysterious unity and identification with God that is revealed in such speeches as the sermon on the mount, and this mysterious unity frightens him. Neusner does not “buy into” Jesus’ program at all. Neusner cannot and will not see Jesus as the

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<sup>91</sup> Neusner, Jacob. *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2000, p.105ss.

Way. Neusner must insist on seeing Jesus as a fellow Israelite who has gone a little too far. Even though as disciples of the Lord we must regret that Neusner has not been able to come to the Lord, we must be glad that Neusner clearly posited what was the self-consciousness of Jesus. Jesus definitely put Himself in the position of being even greater than Moses. Neusner deeply appreciates that Jesus did not alienate Himself from Jewish authorities by trivial things such as breaking the Sabbath but rather the more substantial issue of who He is and what He does. Neusner realizes that Jesus has replaced the centrality of the *Torah* with the centrality of His own person. Neusner cries out “I realize that only God can demand of me what Jesus is asking.<sup>92</sup>” This point however marks a critical juncture in the passage of Mark 12:28-34 as we shall see in the next section.

### 3.8 No One Dared to Question Him Further

The final phrase of our passage is very significant. The first *Jerome Biblical Commentary* states that this line is merely “an editorial comment by which Mark separates the previous stories from the next one in which Jesus takes the initiative.<sup>93</sup>” Father Brown does not think it is very important at all! In the second edition of the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, the passage is

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<sup>92</sup> Neusner, J. *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>93</sup> Brown, RE Ed, *op. cit.* s. 42:73.

not even mentioned.<sup>94</sup> Contrary to Father Brown's passing over of this phrase, others, like Oswald, think it is very significant. Also: Brown's comment gratuitously asserts that Jesus was not taking the initiative in this passage. No. Jesus was masterfully taking the initiative in the interaction with the Scribe.

This final sentence (And no one dared to question Him further) begins with a *kai* parataxis, and continues with a double negative and ends with a favorite Markan word, *epirotao*, to question. These elements militate for a Markan authorship. This particular double negative (*oudeis ouketi*), "no one no longer," is used five times in the Gospel of Mark. The use of the verb "to question" forms an inclusion with verse 18 where it is used previously.

Wolfgang Oswald has noticed "turning points" in the dialogue between Jesus and the Scribe. A major turning point is when the scribe ceases to be the one who questions Jesus and becomes the one examined by Jesus: this happens when Jesus evaluates the Scribe's answer as "*nounekos*," wisely. Suddenly the scribe ceases to be an investigator and becomes a reactor to Jesus. Almost unconsciously, the scribe has been charmed by the commanding presence of Christ and has "bought into" Christ's train of thought. The Scribe helps as a scribe would, by editing and wordsmithing.

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<sup>94</sup> Brown, RE Ed., *op. cit.* s. 41:79.

But then, suddenly, he realizes what is going on and backs off. This is too great a commitment! The others, realizing what is going on, also do not ask any more questions. They realize that talking with this Jesus is playing with fire. Oswald states that verse 34 completely closes off communication any more with Jesus. Not because Jesus stops the conversation, but because the other participants do not want to take the risk to discuss things further. The cause for this reluctance is precisely the change in roles that took place in the course of the dialogue. In the beginning it is the Scribe that judges and tests Jesus. By the end, it is the Scribe that is being judged and tested by Jesus (“You are not far from the Kingdom of God,” “Jesus saw that he answered with intelligence.”) Even the subject of the dialogue has changed. It is no longer a scribal discussion on the question of the most important commandment; now the person of the Scribe is at issue. The others who witness this anthropological turn know what will happen if they start a conversation with Jesus. Whoever starts a conversation with Jesus exposes himself or herself to the risk of becoming a different person.<sup>95</sup> Whoever meets Jesus is challenged to the depths of his or her being. Even though Jesus may need help with “editing” and word usage, yet He is a powerful presence that possesses towering spiritual authority.

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<sup>95</sup> Oswald, W. *Gesprach*, p. 97.

### 3.9 The Version in Matthew and Luke

Although we are not concerned with the Gospels of Luke and Matthew in this dissertation, it is interesting to note that they use the story from Mark for their own purposes. Luke, however, recasts the incident. Luke is consciously redacting the episode. Luke was not Jewish, so the emphasis on the Law is lost. A “scholar of the Law” asks Jesus not what is the greatest commandment, but instead, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?<sup>96</sup>” Jesus then asks the scholar what the Law says. The lawyer then asks for further clarification from Jesus as to who is his neighbor and the famous story of the Good Samaritan is produced. In Luke’s gospel, the law is not as important as the fact that if gentiles obey it they too will inherit eternal life. Luke quotes the Markan story while playing down the focus on the Torah. Notice that Luke uses the four terms that Jesus used but simply quotes them. It may be that Luke was not even aware of Jesus adding the fourth term! Luke’s use of the story and his quoting of Jesus without adverting to the four terms is valuable evidence that Jesus actually used the four terms and thought of Himself as a new Moses. But Luke redacted the story to fit his own purposes.

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<sup>96</sup> Luke 10:26-28

So did Matthew. Matthew uses Mark 12:28 as one of three sources for his version of the story. Hultgren says that Matthew uses Mark 12:28, Luke's Gospel, and material from "Q" and turns Mark's amicable dialogue into a hostile confrontation.<sup>97</sup> Matthew did this because he was aware of the contemporaneous methods of exegesis and midrash used by the Pharisees and he wanted to develop his own exegesis and midrash of the actions and words of Jesus. In doing this, Matthew went beyond the "project" of Mark, which was a more elementary proclamation than a reflective midrash.

### 3.10 Conclusion to Part Three

We have examined Mark 12:28-34 as an interesting episode in the life of Christ that demonstrates many points. First of all, it demonstrates that Jesus unabashedly experienced Himself as quite authoritative *vis-à-vis* the Jewish Religion. Jesus took upon Himself the authority to change or at least recast the most central prayer/creed in the Jewish Religion. Jesus also conjoined elements that had never been conjoined before when He united the *Shema* and the first and second commandment of the Decalogue.

On the other hand, Jesus showed Himself to open to and in need of editorial help from the Scribe. He accepted the Scribe's rewording and reformulating and commented very favorably on the scribe's work. This

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<sup>97</sup> Hultgren, A.J. "The Double Commandment of Love in Mt 22:34-40: Its Sources and Composition," in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 36: 3, 1974, pp. 373-378.

shows the fact that Jesus realized limitations in His ability and accepted help from an “expert.”

From a textual point of view, we have seen what the contributions of source critics, form critics, redaction critics and narrative critics can do. But in the end, we are left with a story that stands on its own and both in spite of redaction and because of redaction transmits at least the *ipsissima cogitatio* of Christ. John P. Meier, an astute Biblical theologian, has stated that we can “rarely, if ever, claim to recover Jesus’ exact words (the *ipsissima verba*).”<sup>98</sup> Meier says that we can hope to appreciate the *ipsissima vox*, the kind of thing he usually or typically said. In this paper I have called that the *ipsissima cogitatio*. Meier sets several criteria for determining this endeavor.<sup>99</sup>

First of all there is the “criterion of embarrassment.” Meier says that any passage in the New Testament that would have embarrassed or created difficulty for the early Church might well be considered as authentic, since the early Church would not create such passages. A prime example of this is the baptism of the sinless and superior Jesus by his inferior John the Baptist. In Mark, the event is simply recounted. In the later Matthew, the story is rationalized by the dialogue in which John professes his unworthiness and

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<sup>98</sup> Meier, JP *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Volume 1 of the Anchor Bible Reference Library, Doubleday, New York, 1991, p. 174.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-180.

Jesus has to command his to proceed. According to this criterion, the Markan story must be authentic since it would not be a likely creation of a community that recognizes Jesus as God and sinless. Now our pericope, Mark 12:28-34, has a very important element that would embarrass the early Church: the fact that Jesus allows Himself to be corrected by the Scribe. Jesus adds the fourth word, but the Scribe recommends using only three words, while accepting Jesus new thought pattern. This notion proceeds from the fact that the Scribe must be appreciated precisely as a scribe and not as a possible disciple of Jesus! This understanding militates for the historicity of the passage.

The next criterion of historicity that Meier proposes is the criterion of discontinuity. According to this idea, any word or deed of Jesus that cannot be derived either from the Judaic culture at the time of Christ or the early Church should be considered historical. An example of this is Jesus' total prohibition of all divorce (Mark 10:2-12). Now certainly Jesus re-wording of the *Shema* presents us with a major disconnect from Jewish tradition. It is also disconnected from early Christian tradition because the early Church would not have bothered with re-wording the *Shema*. And so, according to this second criterion, this pericope should be looked upon as historical.

A third criterion is the criterion of “multiple attestation,” or finding the deed or saying of Jesus in more than one literary source. Now our pericope is in fact found in Mark, Q, Matthew and Luke. In fact it is developed in these sources just as we would expect it to be developed. The startling newness of Jesus’ idea is tamed and domesticated! This tells us that the version in Mark is probably historic and original.

The fourth criterion is the criterion of coherence. According to this criterion, if a deed or saying is positively evaluated by the first three criteria, it is likely to be historical. Our pericope gets positive reinforcement from the first three, and therefore it meets the fourth!

The fifth criterion is the criterion of rejection and execution. This criterion focuses on the effect of Jesus’ words or deeds as causing His violent end. Jesus alienation of Jewish leaders, his changing of treasured Jewish forms of prayer, his overturning of many elements of Jewish law, did in fact threaten and infuriate Jewish leaders. A Jesus who would be bland and innocuous could not be the historical Jesus!

Our pericope handily meets John Meier’s criteria for historicity, especially when we appreciate it according to the methodology of Pamela Tamarkin Reis. Our analysis then concludes that there is a high probability that this passage is historical.

We are left, then, with a mysterious individual who on the one hand claims for Himself Divine prerogatives and on the other hand needs a little editorial help. We are left with a personage who exhibits a striking paradox, a person who has human fallibility and Divine Authority. We are left with the proclamation in Mark of a Messiah who suffers and who calls His disciples to follow in His path. We are left with a weak human being who nonetheless claims for Himself Divine powers and prerogatives. We are left with the *kerygma* of the man Jesus who died but who triumphs as Christ God. This is the “theology” of Mark’s Gospel. It is not in fact an explicit theology that seeks an understanding of a mystery. It is instead an implicit theology, found in the proclamation, that begs for a mechanism to come to some fruitful understanding of its affirmations.

In the next part of this dissertation we will attempt to develop a mechanism for the armamentarium of systematic theology to understand these paradoxes.

## Part Four: A Speculative Theology

### 4.1 Introduction

The fourth part of this dissertation is an attempt to engineer a mechanism that will help us to understand the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ that was demonstrated in our reading of Mark 12:28-34. We will relate this attempt to understand Jesus' self-consciousness to the one biblical passage that we have read, Mark 12:28-34. Our intention is to base this formulation on the philosophy of Bernard J. F. Lonergan. We will attempt to understand his philosophy of human self-consciousness and apply this to the person of Jesus Christ. We will try to see if there is an analogy or a system that we can use to have some understanding of what Jesus' self-consciousness was. Donald G. Dawe, a professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, has stated that "a Christology in the style of Lonergan is much to be desired."<sup>100</sup> Let it be stated right at the outset that I have no illusions that I can write this Christology! My only purpose here is to see if an analogy can be drawn between a correct understanding of human self-consciousness and the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ. There have been attempts to write the complete Christology of

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<sup>100</sup> Dawe, Donald G. "The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology," in *Theology Today*, 44:2, July 1987, p. 302.

Bernard Lonergan<sup>101</sup>. This is a difficult and complicated task and it is probably beyond the abilities of a mere mortal. It will be my more realistic purpose to examine the phenomenological aspects of human consciousness and see if the questions of Jesus' self-consciousness can be better understood.

#### 4.2 The Notion of "Mystery" in Catholic Theology

Now in Catholic theology, the Church recognizes that there are realities that human beings cannot discover except by revelation. Even after they have been revealed, they exceed human comprehension. There are three fundamental mysteries that are paradigmatic of this idea: the Trinity, or the mystery of the communication and sharing of life within the Deity; the Incarnation, which is the most intense sharing of the life of the Deity with created nature; and the actual sharing of divine life to created persons through grace or glory. These three supernatural realities cannot be known by human reason alone and even after they are revealed, are totally beyond the empirical, conceptual comprehension of a created intellect.<sup>102</sup> They have

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<sup>101</sup> Helminiak, Daniel A. *The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology*. Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1986.

<sup>102</sup> This idea of mystery is not obscurantism or a stop-gap. Catholic theologians do not investigate, delineate, dissect, uncover and explain truths of our faith, and then, when the limits of their intellect are reached, take refuge in the concept of mystery. No: mysteries are realities that simply cannot be expressed in empirical, categorical terms. They are transcendent realities that theology seeks to delineate. It is this delineation that is accomplished by the three-fold theological enterprise described in the next few paragraphs. Cf. Rahner, K. "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, Baltimore, Maryland, Helicon Press, 1966, pp. 36-73.

to do with God himself and they are *not* attributes of Himself that He shares with creatures.

There are attributes of Himself that God *does* share. For example, the “goodness” of God is reflected throughout creation, now in one degree, now in another. Reason alone can apprehend and appreciate goodness in the created order and leap to the conclusion that the infinite cause of creation must exhibit this goodness in an exemplary and archetypical way. This is the famous *via positiva* (sometimes called the *via eminentiae*) of St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>103</sup> St. Thomas taught that in speaking of God and Divine mysteries, there are only three possible ways of doing so. In the *via positiva*, as we have seen, we exploit the participatory nature of created beings in the uncreated Being of God. An example of this is “goodness.” There is also the *via negativa*, in which one notes a quality in the created order and then denies that it is present in God. An example of this is mutability. Creatures are mutable, but God is not mutable. This is also called apophatic theology.

Finally, there is the *via analogiae*. In this instance, one seeks some understanding of an attribute of God or a mystery of the supernatural order that God does not share with the created order. The human mind seeks to know what is to be known. By and large, human minds seek to know what

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<sup>103</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q 13.

they experience first through the senses; then their minds range farther afield as they discover that things in the created order share certain characteristics. A child learns that she likes apples and can quite readily learn to appreciate that they are different from broccoli florets. But sooner or later the child learns that there can be *two* apples and there can also be *two* portions of broccoli. The child has had the insight that twoness transcends being either apples or broccoli! And then the human mind is like a newly-freed eagle that soars from one discovery to another. The proper and right object of human intelligence is the intelligible in the sensible. But people want to know everything, not just broccoli and apples, but also twoness and threeness and eventually the infinity that two apples and three pieces of broccoli can inexorably lead to and develop. In transcending the merely material world, the human intellect proceeds by way of analogy even if a particular human may not realize that he or she is doing it. And lurking at the heart of this procedure is the theory of proportionate being. By this we mean that, in fact, God and all supernatural mysteries are the fullness of Being in itself, while created people and things share in this Being by being what they are. God is Being in Himself, *ipsum esse subsistens*. Created beings participate in God's Being. But they share being inasmuch as their being is qualified by some limiting identity. Their identity, their "essence,"

captures a part of Being in itself as an object catches and reflects a ray of the light of the sun. The structure of the act of creation as a sharing of proportional being corresponds to the structure of the human intellect as it grasps first the being of the objects it encounters in daily life, then the realities that transcend those objects, then the Being that transcends all beings. Analogies are the stepping stones or the ladders that enable the mind to move from beings to Being.

Probably the most famous theological analogy is the Augustinian analogy to try to understand the mystery of the Trinity by looking at human cognition and love. Even though the triune nature of God is in no way shared with anything in created nature, still the begetting of the Son and the Spirit are somehow analogous to the begetting of knowledge and love in human nature. In this attempt, Augustine offers a part-theological, part-philosophical account of how God might be understood in analogy to the human mind. Augustine's analogy on the Trinity can also be fairly described as the first modern philosophy of mind: it is the first work in philosophy to recognize the 'problem of other minds,' and the first to offer the 'argument from analogy' as a response to that problem. The analogy does not exhaust

the mystery but gives us some fruitful understanding so that at least we can see that the theological mystery is not opposed to reason.<sup>104</sup>

We have seen that in the one passage that we studied Jesus demonstrated a startling kind of realization that He was master of the Law and stood as a new Moses. We saw that He considered Himself as a special agent of the Kingdom of God and had the authority to decide who was near the Kingdom. We saw that He thought of Himself as equal to and, indeed, above Moses. Now we would like to investigate some questions: What kind of self-consciousness did Jesus have that enabled Him to boldly assert these things? Did Jesus actually think He was God? Is there an *analogy* we can use to understand Jesus' self-consciousness? We do not move from a position of utter naïveté. We stand on the shoulders of the entire Church and we have the certainty of her dogmatic pronouncements.

### 4.3 The Dogmatic Certainties

It is to be stated clearly and simply right at the outset that, in this dissertation, Church dogmatic pronouncements are good things. As a Roman Catholic, this author believes that the Church has the charism to speak authoritatively on matters of faith and morals. When the Church has

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<sup>104</sup> Matthews, Gareth B. "Augustine: On the Trinity" in *The Cambridge Texts on the History of Philosophy*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, 2002.

made a pronouncement, this is not a similar to a parent stopping arguments among the children in the family by saying something like “Because I’m the Daddy!” Each dogmatic pronouncement of the Church is really a firm beginning for further development. When the Church pronounces a dogma, we can be sure that this is a foothold from which we can go higher and higher in an ever more deeply penetrating understanding of the faith. This is especially true to Christological realities.<sup>105</sup> A Church pronouncement is not an end, but rather a beginning.<sup>106</sup>

Take for example the early Christological struggle over the nature of Jesus Christ. Was Jesus God, or was He Man? Early theologians were stuck in a loop. *Either* He was God *or* He was a man. There were plenty of characteristics to be found in the scriptures supporting either one or the other formulation. But Chalcedon happened and said that it was not a question of “either...or” but rather an appreciation that He was “both...and.” And in this spirit-directed and authoritative pronouncement, the Church safeguarded both the human and the Divine nature of Jesus Christ and pointed out that

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<sup>105</sup> Rahner, Karl. “Kalkedon: Eine oder Anfang.” *Das Konzil von Kalkedon*, Grillmeier, A and Bacht, H., eds. Wurzburg, 1954, Vol 3, pp. 3-49.

<sup>106</sup> See for example the thought of Robert M. Doran, an incisive disciple of Lonergan. In his book *What is Systematic Theology?*, (Toronto University Press, Toronto, Canada, 2005) Doran points out that the principle function of systematic theology is precisely an analogical understanding of the mysteries of faith. A systematic theologian does not even begin his work until the point at hand has received dogmatic status in the Church. Interestingly, Doran reminds us that it was the First Vatican Council that emphasized the notion of understanding dogma and not just reporting it. Doran performs a valuable function for us by helping us realize that the First Vatican Council had quite a bit to say.

there was indeed a reality, a mystery, in which God communicated His nature so intimately and irrevocably with humanity that there was no other created reality in existence to match it and no created intellect that could completely understand it. This mystery was given the name of Incarnation. Note that the dogmatic definition does not understand or conceptualize a mystery. It merely affirms its existence even though human minds cannot capture its reality in a concept.

In this paradigm, we can see that a “mystery” is a reality that is an infinite and non-conceptual reality that is in fact the proper object of a being that is open to the infinite. The human soul, since it is capable, at least potentially, of appreciating the infinite, is by its very nature open to accept the incomprehensible as a mystery *per se*.<sup>107</sup>

What are the theological certainties that the Roman Catholic Faith has provided for us? Any first-year student of Christology could repeat the following synthesis:<sup>108</sup>

The Bible, by the inspired authors of the New Testament, has left us with the certainty that Christ was one person and that He was both divine and human. No one impugned the acceptability of these affirmations for

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<sup>107</sup> Rahner, Karl & Vorgrimler, Herbert. “Mystery,” in *Theological Dictionary*, New York: Herder & Herder, 1965, pp. 300-301.

<sup>108</sup> Look for instance at *the New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Edited by the Catholic University of America, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1967. Cf. articles such as “Christology,” vol. 3, p. 662.

quite a while. The earliest threats were Ebionites and Docetists who gave crude and inarticulate questionings to the accepted teaching on Christ. They were answered by the Apostolic Fathers and the early apologists who simply repeated the Gospel message verbatim or in equivocal terms. Their work has left us with the impression that the apostolic and sub-apostolic period had a vigorous and clear faith. Toward the 300s, Greek philosophy began to affect the thinking of the Church and terms such as *person* and *nature* received more precision and sharpness. Arians could not get their heads around the divinity of Christ; Apollinarians denied Jesus a human mind/rational soul; Nestorians thought that in Christ there was a union between a Divine Person and a human person; Monophysites decided that the union was much more than that and therefore there could be only one person in Christ; and Monothelites could not live with more than one faculty of will. The Ecumenical Councils of Nicea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon forged dogmatic definitions which still today remain a clear expression of the faith of the Church in Jesus our Lord. There is one Divine Person, the second person of the Blessed Trinity. In the mystery of the Incarnation, this Divine person took on human nature; thus there are two natures in Christ, and each has its fullness of apparatus including will and wit. We rest on and depend

on these dogmatic definitions of faith. Even non-Catholics seem to depend on most of them, too.

It is the wit of Jesus that we seek to examine. Did Jesus know that He is God? Did He find this out little by little? Did He have to ask Himself, “Am I God?” Is there some way that we can seek to know the structure and activity of the consciousness of the man called Jesus whom we worship as the Christ? If there were some way to fathom the self-consciousness of Jesus, perhaps we could understand why and how Jesus felt that He could change and develop the teaching of the most highly regarded person in the Jewish religion, Moses.

What precisely does the magisterium have to say about the self-consciousness of Christ? The teaching of the Church in this regard can be safely outlined by looking at the summary provided in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>109</sup> Interestingly enough, the Church teaches that from the earliest times, the first heresies to confront the Church were denials of Jesus’ humanity (*Catechism*, 465-471). Even as early as the scriptural letters of John, the Church upheld the reality of Jesus’ humanity against a docetic tendency. One of the earliest heretics was Apollinarius of Laodicea who

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<sup>109</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Latin Official Text copyright 1994, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City State. The translation that we use is the version authorized by the United States Catholic Conference, Inc., published by Tabor Publishing, Allen, Texas, 1994. Hereafter all references will simply be in the text, *Catechism*, Paragraph #.

taught that in the Incarnation the eternal Word took the place of a human soul in Jesus so that Jesus' humanity was only a shell. The Church countered this by teaching that the eternal Word took on a "rational human soul (*Catechism*, 471)." The Catechism strongly affirms that Jesus' human nature was fully complete, containing its operations of intellect and will, and even human bodily functions. But all that is human is expressed not by a human person but by the Divine second person of the Trinity. This is true so much so that in the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus actually relates to the Father and to the Holy Spirit in a human way, with human will, intellect, body and heart.

The Catechism upholds that the human knowledge of Jesus was limited, and that Jesus could grow in wisdom, learn from experience, and even be ignorant of one thing or another. This limitation corresponded to the *kenosis* of the incarnation. The Catechism even quotes Philippians 2:7 in reiterating that Jesus took on the form of a slave. The Catechism clearly and unequivocally teaches that Jesus had a human soul, a human intellect, a human way of growing in knowledge, and that this intellect's knowledge was limited (*Catechism*, 471-472).

Yet on the other hand the *Catechism* also maintains that Christ's truly human knowledge "expressed the Divine Life of His Person. (*Catechism*,

473).” This truly human knowledge also had a real knowledge of the Father, of His relationship with the Father, and a knowledge of everything that pertains to Divinity. The *Catechism* points out that this knowledge is “immediate.” (This little word is key to understanding our development of this thesis. Please keep it in mind.) The *Catechism* maintains that Jesus’ human knowledge “enjoyed the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans He had come to reveal (*Catechism*, 474).” And here is the nub of the problem: how is it that Jesus could be both ignorant and all-knowing at the same time? We might say it in these terms: how is it that Jesus could consider Himself authoritative enough to change the *Shema* and yet need the help of a scribe to find the right words?

It is a remarkable thing that the *Catechism* is able to uphold both sides of this theological conundrum. The *Catechism* simply states that both realities are true and both realities are to be held. It does not try to explain the seeming contradiction. In this restraint it is clearly following the footsteps of Church teaching on many other fronts, beginning from the dogma that Jesus is **both** God **and** man and continuing through other dogmas such as the source of Church teaching being **both** Scripture **and** tradition or that the means of salvation is **both** faith **and** good works. This is the particular genius of Roman Catholicism. The Church does not seek to

explain the teaching but simply to state it. This is the dogmatic part of theology; it remains for a speculative or systematic theologian to try to explain it. This “explanation” is never a complete understanding but it is a fruitful understanding.

In the past many people could not tolerate the seeming contradiction. It spoiled their neat little world-views to think that there could be a reality that did not fit their preconceived notions. The Arians could not swallow a Christ who is **both** God **and** man: they needed Christ to be one or the other because their world view did not have a mechanism to deal with a reality that went beyond their limited concepts. Even today this is true. Jacques Dupuis, SJ, contributed to *A Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in his analysis of the teaching on the incarnation of the Son of God showed himself to be one of these people who simply do not understand theology as dealing with mysteries of faith beyond human reasoning. Dupuis is comfortable with the *Catechism* clearly teaching that Jesus’ human knowledge is limited. But then he opines that to say “that Jesus ‘enjoyed in His human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans He came to reveal’ seems unwarranted by the evidence which

is cited...<sup>110</sup> Dupuis is falling into Arianism. Dupuis tries to avoid falling into the trap by saying “what can and must be affirmed, in a more sober way, is that Jesus did know all that He needed to know for the exercise of His revealing and saving mission; no less and no more.<sup>111</sup>” It is quite amazing that the Son of God was on a “need-to-know basis” in the economy of salvation! Dupuis has forgotten that there are realities that are mysteries that go beyond what we are familiar with. Dupuis cannot keep the “both...and” in mind. He seeks a Christ-consciousness that is “either...or” But in the consciousness of Christ, we have a consciousness that is **both** limited by its humanity **and** yet at least open to infinity: such that that eternal word, absolutely and fully conscious of His Divinity, can be humanly conscious in some way of His Divinity.

Our thesis is that if we understand human knowing according to the paradigm of Bernard Lonergan, there is a way that this can be at least partially understood. There is a way that a human being can become conscious of infinite reality. There is a way that, in the mystery of the Incarnation, a Divine Person can, in human consciousness, have **both** the fullness of understanding of the eternal mystery of salvation **and** yet still be limited and be subject to growth in realization.

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<sup>110</sup> Walsh, Michael J., ed. *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1994, pp.120ss.

<sup>111</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

Since the reality of the Incarnation is a phenomenon that is unique in Christianity, and since the Incarnation is not an attribute or activity of God that is directly shared by any other part of creation such as “goodness” or “beauty,” how can we seek to understand it? How can we seek to understand how a Divine Person can become humanly conscious of His Being? We cannot move from lesser incarnations to The Incarnation, so the *via eminentiae* must be ruled out. So, too, the *via negative* simply does not fit this endeavor. But the *via analogiae*: can this structure serve our purposes?

We must remember that this use of analogy to understand Divine realities is at one and the same time powerful and yet weak. It derives its power from the fact that God, as the source of all being, shares His being with creation and therefore “being” is the bridge that links us to the creator as the basis and underpinning of our existence. And yet it is weak because the difference between Being and beings is so absolute and infinite that it is not only a praiseworthy intellectual *tour de force* but at the same time the height of presumption to think that we can extrapolate from the one to the Other. Remember that the distinction between the creator and the created is fundamental to our psychological balance, our theological well-being, and the control of our egos.

#### 4.4 The Self-Consciousness of Christ

Highly respected Christologists have in the past tried to elucidate the “self-consciousness” of Christ. For example, Reginald H. Fuller in his classic *Foundations of New Testament Christology* tries to tease out the authentic sayings of Christ in the New Testament to find out which title the Lord would use for himself. Fuller appreciates the fact that such titles as “Messiah” or “Son of God” may be later examples of the faith of the community rather than the self-consciousness of Jesus Himself. Fuller thinks that Jesus understood Himself as an “eschatological prophet” who would be vindicated in the end.<sup>112</sup> In this masterpiece, Fuller studies all the major Christologists such as Bultmann, Kummel, Robinson, Bornkamm, Dodd, Wrede, Cullman, and others. They all tried to vet out the authentic words of Jesus and thereby try to glimpse His self-consciousness. They all accomplished quite a bit and they are not to be disparaged. But they all acknowledged that separating the *ipsissima verba* of the Lord was very difficult to do. They could not with absolute certainty ferret out the *ipsissima verba* of Christ in order to fathom His self-consciousness. This is a task that is fraught with peril since it is practically impossible to know

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<sup>112</sup> Fuller, Reginald H. *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*. New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965, pp. 102-130.

what Christ said and thought about Himself. We just cannot get past the interpretation of that first generation of Christ's followers.

How then can we hope to understand the self-consciousness of Christ in this paper? *We are not in fact interested in whatever titles that Jesus used for himself.* These are not accessible to us. We are interested in a deeper question: what did Christ perceive about himself in the depths of his being that gave him the confidence to change the words of the *Shema*, to think of Himself as authoritative in the regulation of the Kingdom of God, and to place Himself above even Moses. These behaviors of Christ are less modified by the reporters of His story than His words are. And through these behaviors we can see what He really thought of Himself. For it was His behavior that the gospel writers were seeking to explain by reporting and tailoring his words. It is our thesis that the behavior and actions of Christ are a far more accurate mirror of the self-consciousness of Christ than the words of the evangelists.

#### 4.5 What really is "Self-Consciousness?"

We now come to very central idea in this paper. We begin by pointing out that consciousness of self is a very difficult and elusive

philosophical notion to grasp. The central notion is this: consciousness of self is knowing oneself precisely as a subject and not as an object.

Consciousness of self is *not* the same as knowing whether one is a prophet, the Son of Man, the Messiah, or the Son of God. These things are pieces of objective, empirical knowledge that describe a person both in relations to others and in himself. These things are incredibly valuable and historically-explained terms that describe Jesus very well. They are actually inspired words in the Scriptures that serve to describe Jesus accurately. They serve useful purposes in Christian dogmatics, catechesis and devotion. But they are not self-consciousness.

**Self-consciousness is instead the intimate knowledge that one has of oneself precisely as a *subject* and not as an *object*.** Bernard J. F.

Lonergan was a profound thinker who was one of the clearest expositors to explain self-consciousness.<sup>113</sup> His thought is difficult and not accessible to the average casual reader. There are those who say that he wrote in an unnecessarily complicated and Gothic way. However, he was really the first theologian to try to explicate in a clear manner what we all do when we think and speak about God (or about anything else). A protestant theologian

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<sup>113</sup> Lonergan, B.J.F. *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*. The Robert Mollot Collection, being Volume 7 of the collected works of Bernard J.F. Lonergan, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Canada, 2002. This is a translation of Lonergan's Latin text of 1956. Hereafter it will be referred to as O&P. Cf. pp. 157-190.

once said that he read many books to find out “what the Catholics are thinking.” But he reads Lonergan “to find out what I am doing when I think.” Lonergan’s purpose was to try to describe and understand consciousness and knowledge. When Lonergan wanted to talk about self-consciousness he used two Latin words, *conscientia* and *experientia*. We will use the word *self-consciousness*. This self-consciousness is not the same as awareness of anything else.

Lonergan carefully explains self-consciousness as a special kind of knowledge that exists when a knowing subject *knows himself precisely as a subject*. In most acts of knowledge, a knower, the subject, knows an object. This object may be any being at all. It may be a physical object such as an apple or a pear. It may be an idea, a phantasm, such as the fundamental theorem of calculus. It may be another person, another distinct being subsisting in an intellectual nature. It may even be a negation of being, such as the judgment that “centaurs do not exist.” In any example it is a subject reaching out to a part of creation, an object, and apprehending it in an intellectual way. But self-consciousness is different: it is knowing the self precisely as a subject and not as an object.

Consciousness of self is not to be thought of as an “inward look.”<sup>114</sup>

Most people have trouble grasping this and their most fundamental problem is that they think that all knowing is “taking a look.”<sup>115</sup> Knowing is not taking a look. It is a complicated process in which a subject forms a concept, or in Lonergan’s words, an *intelligible emanation*. Much less is self-consciousness an inward look, like examining oneself in a mirror. Self-consciousness is knowledge of self precisely as self and not as an object. It is therefore non-conceptual, non-thematic, non-imaginable, transcendent.

Lonergan says that self-consciousness is an awareness that is immanent in any and all cognitional acts.<sup>116</sup> It is a knowledge that can not be conceptualized because it is prior to any conceptual knowledge, not in time but in structure. In order for a subject to be aware of any object, the subject must concomitantly be aware of himself or herself as a subject; and this awareness is immanent in any and all cognitional acts. As soon as a human being knows something, he or she knows himself or herself as a subject in an act of knowledge that transcends all acts of objective knowledge that might occur.

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<sup>114</sup> Lonergan, B.J.F. *Insight*. Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1957. P. 320. Note that this book has been published and re-published many times.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 635.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

It must be stated very clearly that self-consciousness is not introspection. Acts of introspection are merely acts of objective knowledge under the guise of self-knowing. They are still a subject reaching out to an object, even if the object in this case is a conceptualization of what one thinks of oneself or what one ought to think of oneself.

Let us give an example or an exercise as a heuristic exercise. Let us work on a problem in math, and, please, let us put 100% of our attention on this little problem:

$$\text{Let } 1/3 = .333\dots$$

$$\text{Then } 3 \times 1/3 = 3 \times .333\dots$$

$$\text{And then } 1 = .999\dots$$

What is wrong with the above picture? The quantity 1 simply cannot be the same as .999..., can it? No, of course not. This is simply a case in which the operations of arithmetic fail because irrational numbers need a more sophisticated set of tools than arithmetic can supply. The example is an attempt to solve a problem with tools that are not adequate to the task; it is a “puzzle” that we are using to try to get the reader to engage themselves 100% in objective consciousness to illustrate something else.

The real problem is not a math problem, the real problem is to give an example of self-consciousness. How does this arithmetical conundrum do

that? While we worked on that problem, and if we put 100% of our attention on the problem, did we have any consciousness of our self as self? Someone might answer “Of course not! I was paying 100% attention to the problem. I wasn’t thinking of myself!”

That’s right. We should have had no objective consciousness of self because we were supposed to be strictly paying attention to the problem at hand.

But in fact we were intensely conscious of ourselves as subjects and this self-consciousness was an action that was immanent in the objective consciousness that was being exercised in the solving of the math problem. This self-consciousness was not conceptual, it was not thematic, it was not adverted to, and it was not formulated as a proposition or judgment. It was a process that existed concomitantly with the act of objective knowing, that was immanent in the act of objective knowing, and that was metaphysically prior, not temporally prior, to the act of knowing. It was an immediate and intimate knowledge of our self as self and not as object. Lonergan would call this self-consciousness a transcendental knowledge. It is precisely because our intellect can be self-conscious in a transcendental way that we are capable of learning about math problems and irrational numbers. Our consciousness is capable of transcendence, it is capable of infinity. Our

intellect can, precisely as human intellect, be open to the infinite on this transcendental, non-conceptual level. In this sense, the ability of immediate and non-conceptual self-consciousness is the engine that drives all acts of real knowing. Because we are capable of knowing infinity in a transcendental way, this capability percolates over into our conceptual consciousness and enables us to grasp being in understanding and judgment. We are not, like animals, bound to individual pieces of sense knowledge that can only connect experiences from force of habit. This human transcendental consciousness cannot be formulated. To attempt to formulate it adds to one's collections of concepts but it does not make one more conscious. And just as consciousness is not increased by attempting to formulate or understand it, it is not decreased by denying it! In a sense, appreciating the nature of self-consciousness as non-conceptual is akin to understanding the old Buddhist Koan "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" People struggle mightily to describe and conceptualize and delineate a reality that simply cannot be described, conceptualized or delineated. But simply performing the gesture of one hand clapping gives a perfect experience of the sound of one hand clapping!

Self-consciousness is a consciousness that every knower has in every act of knowledge. Now it is true that some people have fewer acts of

knowledge than others, some have more. Some people have ease of acquiring knowledge and can leap from insight to insight quite readily. Others struggle with fundamental insights and have difficulty understanding and formulating even the simplest of ideas. Both classes of people however have knowledge of themselves precisely as subjects as soon as they learn something whether it is a simple insight such as  $2 + 2 = 4$ , or a more difficult insight such as the fundamental theorem of calculus. Even merely sense knowledge awakens this subjective consciousness. When we see a color, Lonergan says that we become aware not only of that color as an object but also on the side of the subject we become aware in a non-conceptual way of the one seeing and also the act of seeing.<sup>117</sup> This self-consciousness is present in all the different levels of human knowing, from perception to understanding to judgment. This self-consciousness is prior to any intellectual inquiry or conceptualization.

Since this self-consciousness is an experiential, non-conceptual knowledge it is not mediated by concepts or rational processes or heuristic structures. It is immediate, it is infallible, it is complete and it is perfect since it does not depend on proper formulations of conceptual realities or the proper configuration of data or the proper and orderly presentation of prior

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<sup>117</sup> *O&P*, p. 159.

insights. All that has to happen is that a subject knows an object and the subject infallibly, inexorably, non-reflexively, and completely thoroughly knows itself as a knowing subject. Self-consciousness is a very elusive reality to understand, and in fact it is probably safe to say that we can understand what it is not easier than what it is. But we know that there are non-conceptual realities. Self-consciousness is one of the most important non-conceptual realities in that it is the ground and matrix of all our acts of knowing and judging.

This self-consciousness is not a knowledge that is attained under the “formality of the true or of being<sup>118</sup>” but rather under the formality of the experienced. What is attained under the formality of the true or of being is the product of intellectual inquiry. It is conceptual. It is the result of asking questions such as “what is it?” or “is it true?” But the non-conceptual is simple experience. A subject simply experiences his or her existence and activity and this experience is truly knowledge but not conceptual, not reasoned, and not a little at a time. The subject’s grasp of himself or herself is the prerequisite for the eventual emergence of intellectual inquiry, conceptualization, sorting out, prioritizing, and judging as to value.

“Experience in the strict sense attains being, but not under the formality of being; it attains the true, but not under the

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<sup>118</sup> *O&P*, p.161.

formality of the true; it attains the intelligible, but not under the formality of the intelligible; and it attains the definable, but not under the formality of the definable. Rather, under the formality of the experienced, it truly attains being, the intelligible and the definable.<sup>119</sup>”

This self-consciousness is a preliminary, unstructured awareness of oneself.

It is not “introspection.” Introspection is a conceptual process of inquiry into the characteristics of a human being that can be done by psychologists, historians, gossips, sociologists, egoists and saints; sometimes technically and scientifically, sometimes fraught with biases. But the fundamental awareness of oneself precisely as subject is a clear, immediate, infallible, complete and perfect attainment of the being of a knower without any possibility of bias, error, favoritism, or perversion.

#### 4.6 Self-Consciousness as Transcendental

Let us examine more deeply the notion of self-consciousness as transcendental, non-empirical knowledge. Lonergan’s constant refrain is that real knowledge is not “taking a look.” He recognizes that most ordinary people think of knowing as looking and picturing. To Lonergan, knowing is in some metaphysical way actually apprehending being and not just taking a

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<sup>119</sup> *O&P*, p. 163.

look.<sup>120</sup> If a person has an insight into the truth of a proposition or the existence of a reality, that person is apprehending being. Lonergan operates within a matrix of proportionate being: God of course being the perfect fulfillment of all Being. Therefore, the fact that persons know and want to know means to Lonergan that they are open to infinite Being. This is called the unrestricted desire to know. We are capable of infinity!<sup>121</sup>

But we will never attain infinity. Our unrestricted desire to know is mated to a limited opportunity to attain knowledge. We are hemmed in first of all by time; then by the fact that we can only experience so much at a given time. We are even hemmed in by geography; we cannot go everywhere. But yet we are capable of infinity on the level of being itself. Even though the entire world of beings (with a small “b”) lies beyond our limited grasp, by the fact that we can know being, the Infinite Being (with a large “B”) can be appreciated in some way. This appreciation is of course effected by extrapolation. We grow and we develop, now quickly, now slowly, now deeply, now superficially. Some people learn to understand many individual beings and then they realize that there must be a Being that

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<sup>120</sup> *Insight*, p. 635.

<sup>121</sup> Lonergan says that just as the hand is the instrument capable of using any other instrument, so the human knower is the knower capable of knowing all Being. In acts of human knowing, a knower knows only finite realities as objects. The knower understands only this or that material nature. But it is the nature of understanding itself to know the analogous concept of *ens*. And the concept of *ens* is not just another concept; it is the transcendental reality that can end only in the supernatural vision of God. This is pp. 86-87 cf *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1968.

transcends and supersedes all other beings. Now animals cannot do this. Animals have real knowledge but their knowledge is sensate and inexorably tied to each individual being. They have no capability whatsoever to extrapolate from beings to Being. They may know their master but they cannot know that their master shares a nature that transcends all other similar beings. From the point of view of the pet, the master is ontogenetically unique but might as well be phylogenetically unique, too! This is because every single act of knowledge for an animal, real as it may be, is just that: a single act of sense knowledge. Animals can only tie them together by force of habit, by welding synapses after repeated individual experiences. Robert Spitzer explains this very poetically:

“Of course, we cannot say for certain that an eagle never thinks of the infinite, or about unconditional love or beauty. If the eagle does, it certainly does not display frustration about not achieving the perfect, or despair about not comprehending unconditional love, or anger about never creating the perfect utopia, or frustration about not comprehending the mathematical paradoxes of infinity. Eagles have never been known to cut off their ears when their aesthetic senses cannot be perfectly reproduced on canvas. Their awareness of the sublime beauty of music seems rather to be obliviousness. They simply never display any behavior indicating a concern for God, or the infinite itself, or for ultimate explanations, or for the complete set of answers to the complete set of questions. It is therefore quite reasonable to believe that human beings are the unique possessors of these powers among the many species on earth.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Spitzer, Robert. *Life Principles: A Model for Teaching the Philosophy of the Pro-Life Movement*. Found at <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0503.html>.

Human beings therefore have a *transcendental* element to their knowing. Because there is a self-consciousness that is present in each and every act of knowledge there is a scaffolding that can tie together each individual act of knowledge and yield a cumulative effect. With the primitive and yet profound realization that “I” am different from everything else comes an ability to order and categorize, rank and file every single being that the “I” comes to understand. This is the transcendental element in human knowing, the self-consciousness that enables us to not only experience but also to understand and to judge. Self-consciousness is transcendental in the sense that it is present in every single act of knowing and it is the reality that enables the knowing to be truly human.

It is also transcendental in the sense that it is immanent in every single act of knowing. Here again is an example of the fact that what is most transcendent is what is most immanent. Each and every time a human subject knows an object, that human subject is conscious of himself or herself. This self-consciousness is the ground of the objective knowledge even though it requires the objective act of knowing to exist in itself. It is metaphysically, but not temporally, prior. And it is occasioned by the act of

objective knowledge but not formally caused by it. Let us look more closely at this point.<sup>123</sup>

#### 4.7 The Relationship between Objective and Subjective Knowing

God, from all eternity, knows Himself. His knowledge of Himself since He is God must be absolutely perfect and complete. This is the first premise of Augustine's analogy. Augustine goes on to develop the generation of the Word and the spiration of the Spirit from this process. But here we are content to note that God knows Himself completely, perfectly, infallibly, and independently of any other act of knowledge. We are created in the image and likeness of God and we, too, can know ourselves. We can know ourselves precisely as what we are, subjects. But our knowledge of ourselves as subjects is in a certain sense contingent and dependant on objective knowledge for it is only in acts of objective knowledge that we know ourselves as subjects. Our subjective knowledge, our self-consciousness, is only actualized when we know something else objectively. Our ability to know ourselves with a similar self-consciousness as God has of Himself is in this life tied to acts of objective knowing. When a human being first discovers that there is a world out there and that he or she can

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<sup>123</sup> *Insight*, pp. 322-340.

interact with that world and enjoy it and change it and manipulate it, he or she begins to have self-consciousness and this self-consciousness is immanent in all his or her acts of knowing. It also transcends all his or her acts of knowing. And it is the formal constituent of truly human knowledge that marks us as created in the image of the infinite self-knower. In the realm of ordinary, objective consciousness, human beings need a concept or a species, an essence or a created reality to 'turn on' their ability to know. But immanent in that action is a self-consciousness that reflects the way God knows, directly, non-reflexively, completely and perfectly. We are truly made in the image of God and we reflect that image precisely in knowing ourselves as subject.

This self-consciousness both energizes and is constituted by different acts of knowing and different levels of knowledge. If human knowledge runs the gamut of sensing, perceiving, imagining, inquiring, having insight, formulating and, finally, judging, so self-consciousness in some sense matches and relates to these successive developments of human knowing.

#### 4.8 Self-consciousness Denotes Human Knowledge

It is precisely self-consciousness that makes human knowledge so unique. Animals have real knowledge. But their knowledge is purely

objective. Each act of knowing is unique and the only things that even begin to transcend the acts of sense knowledge are habits welded into neuronal pathways. A dog can learn to avoid the electric fence. A human being can learn about electric fences, build them, and use them to corral his pets without ever being shocked by one.

Human beings can know and also know that they know and know that they are knowers. Lonergan says:

“Am I a knower? If I am not, then I know nothing. My only course is silence. My only course is not the excused and explained silence of the skeptic, but the complete silence of the animal that offers neither excuse nor explanation for its complete absorption in merely sensitive routines.<sup>124</sup>”

Human knowledge is unique simply because it is structured around self-consciousness. Our self-consciousness enables us to come to an appreciation of our *ego* as distinct from all objects. Our self-consciousness enables us to rank and categorize all other realities. Our self-consciousness is the unifying and underlying reality that energizes and empowers our ability to know in a human way. The eagle that we spoke of earlier may have a view of the universe that we lack because we cannot soar above the clouds. But we humans have a view of the reality of the universe that transcends all earthly views.

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<sup>124</sup>*Insight*, p. 329.

#### 4.9 Self-consciousness as Non-conceptual

It is a difficult thing to grasp the notion that self-consciousness is non-conceptual. We are so used to using concepts that we think that everything has to be conceptual. The malignant form of this philosophical disease is to think of knowing as “taking a look.” Now it is true that much of our knowledge is actuated by dealing with a *species*. We know that our intellect operates in a fashion that is absolutely dependant on an expressed species of an object. This is because we do not know the way God knows. God knows by immediate and direct knowledge of all that is. All of God’s knowledge is perfect and infinitely complete in one eternal act of knowing. Our knowledge has to come in bits and pieces. Our potency to know, to use an Aristotelian term, is limited by the acts available to us. One man or woman simply cannot know all that there is to know in a conceptual sense because they cannot be everywhere and live in every time. On the conceptual level, our infinite capacity to know, as we have said, is wedded to a finite opportunity to achieve that knowledge.

The human subject does not automatically know itself by a direct grasp of its own essence.<sup>125</sup> It must know itself within other acts of human knowing, acts of objective knowledge. The act of knowing oneself precisely as a subject means that the subject knows itself not by a *species* of itself but immanently in knowing a *species* of some object.<sup>126</sup> But it takes the greatest introspective skill to realize this! Lonergan followed Aristotle and Aquinas in being able to traffic in this rarefied commerce. We can hopefully get a glimpse of what they mean and understand that all human subjects know themselves, and know themselves precisely as subjects. It would appear though that only a few can have some fruitful understanding of what this mystery means.

It means above all that self-consciousness is not conceptual. No one can draw a picture or diagram of the human subject. No one can formulate an equation or mathematical theorem that encompasses the human subject. No one can even write a poem or craft a melody that would express the essence of the human subject. It goes beyond any concept or picture. It is a being that is made in the image of God and therefore shares in His ineffable infinite nature.

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<sup>125</sup> Lonergan, B.J.F., *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1968. P. 76. This book was originally published as articles in *Theological Studies* between 1946 and 1949.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Lonergan proposes the analogy that just as heat is immanent in fire, so the act of self-consciousness is immanent in acts of human knowing. The heat depends on objects to burn in order to exist; just as the human intellect needs objective knowledge as grist for its mill. Yet it is the heat that is the thing that drives the flames of the intellect to devour with understanding every question that gets in its path.<sup>127</sup>

Lonergan says that those who mistakenly understand self-consciousness as a type of perception actually take their thoughts about themselves and operate on them forgetting that they are “percepts.” As a result they run into enormous difficulties when they try to determine whether or not this or that is directly perceived by self-consciousness or whether some process of ratiocination may have intervened. They cannot grasp the nature of themselves as subjects because the non-conceptual reality of “subject” eludes their grasp like a person trying to squeeze a drop of mercury. The more one grasps, the more the mercury eludes grasp.

Lonergan says that those who correctly understand self-consciousness as primordial experience consider such “questions superfluous and even rather absurd<sup>128</sup>” since self-consciousness does not perceive anything

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

<sup>128</sup> *O&P*, p. 173.

because what is known through this self-consciousness is not found in objective knowledge but rather only in subjective knowledge.

Human self-consciousness (or consciousness or subjective knowledge) is not then any awareness of an object observed, perceived, felt, experienced, studied, understood or judged. It is the activity of the subject that is observing, perceiving, feeling, experiencing, studying, understanding or judging. All these operations are at least notionally different on the side of the object. But on the side of the subject, they have in common the single act of self-consciousness that enables and allows them all to be human acts.

#### 4.10 The Infallibility of Self-consciousness

Since the knowledge a human subject has of itself is not conceptual (even though it must depend on concepts to be actuated) it is not subject to the vagaries that beset conceptual knowledge. Conceptual knowledge depends on the derived rationality of discursive exercise. When we experience a thing, form an idea of what the thing is, decide whether or not it exists, judge whether or not it is true, our discursive rationality must traverse many roads and byways, all of which introduce the possibility of error. But the knowledge of our self as subject is awakened within these acts and even our revision of these acts and the knowledge of our self as subject is

infallible, complete, and absolutely inerrant because it does not depend on the fragile tools available to our perceiving and our formulating of a *species*. It is immediate and complete knowledge in itself. Lonergan explains this by saying that the knower is to the known as Art is to artificial products. The knower as subject-known is like the faculty of Art in that it grasps immediately and in an unconditioned way the absolute and simplest essence of a reality. But then it seeks to embody this insight into wood or stone or words. And the object of art is never quite as perfect as the artist's conception of the reality!<sup>129</sup> But the artist's inner realization is perfectly accurate. Likewise the subjective knowledge of the knower is able to perfectly understand the nature of the knower in one simple act of knowledge. Even though the self-consciousness of the knower depends on the knower knowing other objects, yet the act of self-consciousness is distinct from objective knowledge. Only in God (and perhaps angels) does all knowledge exist as direct and experienced and infallible. In human beings, it is contingent on objective knowing of this or that material nature. But as the transcendent element of all acts of knowledge, it is infallible, complete, non-conceptual and constitutive of that which is human knowing.

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<sup>129</sup> *Verbum*, p. 80-81.

#### 4.11 Jesus and the Scribe

We return to our scriptural passage. We have seen that in Mark 12: 28-34 we have an example of Jesus behaving in a costly and strange way. Costly, in that it would require His life. Strange, in that it went completely counter to the culture He was reared in. The behavior of Christ is probably less liable to interpretation than the words of Christ. We have here a Jesus who acts as though He thinks of Himself as above Moses, as able to change the inspired and sacred words of the *Shema*, and who does these things even though it eventually costs Him His life. This behavior is what is behind all the evangelists' telling of the story; the behavior, or *ipsissima cogitatio*, is a given. How the evangelists tried to explain it is the redactive process they used.

Mark 12: 28-34 is the earliest of these redactions and probably has the least amount of interpretation. But Mark tries to portray Jesus as the new Moses, the new lawgiver, an agent of the Kingdom, and even the Messiah. Mark recognizes Jesus' authority and power.

Mark has a scribe engage in a dialogue with Jesus. This particular Scribe bonds with Jesus and sees something in Jesus that the other scribes did not see. He appreciates the fact that Jesus has added a dimension to the *Shema* that could well be added. But the Scribe acts like a scribe: he assists

Jesus in rendering the terms more precise and more socially acceptable. He adds something to the composition that Jesus simply did not do and simply could not humanly achieve without a scribe's training and education. And so, we have a Jesus who really and truly is humanly conscious, who needs the help of the scribe in editing his composition, and who on the conceptual level simply does not know all the answers. We have a scribe who is a scribe; just as in 1 Samuel we had a witch who was a witch. (Neither the scribe nor the witch were disciples of Judaism or Jesus.) We have a Jesus who is completely human but a Jesus who is at the same time much more than human.

This is clearly the teaching of the Church and it is a paradox, a seeming contradiction, like so many doctrines in the history of the Church. In the case of the Arians, for example, they could not get beyond the point that Jesus had to be either God or man. However, once the doctrine of the Church pointed out that there was in the incarnation a new reality that could bear both natures, then it became possible to fathom God become man. In the case of the consciousness of Christ, there are those today who are in the same position as the ancient Arians. There are those who simply cannot fathom the fact that in the Incarnation there is a Person who at the same time knows that He is God and yet is humanly ignorant of many things. It is

precisely in using the understanding of Bernard Lonergan of human knowing, there is a way to appreciate how a human being in Christ can both be ignorant and at the same time have the fullness of understanding of His identity. This does not remove the mystery. The transcendental remains ineffable. We will never be able to put our transcendental self-consciousness into conceptual terms. As a matter of fact, even God the Father cannot fully put into human concepts the content of His knowledge. When He generated the Son, however, a human being was made who was able to become humanly conscious of Divine realities in a transcendental way. The Son therefore, while being on a transcendental level absolutely and completely co-cognizant with the Father, had, through the mystery of the incarnation, the opportunity to become conscious in a human way of all that was necessary to fulfill His mission. But He was not on a “need-to-know” basis. He simply did **not** know in the conceptual part of His human knowledge. But on the transcendental side, in His very human knowing, he was 100% conscious of His Divine Being and the Father’s Being. This transcendental knowledge inspired and enabled His conceptual knowledge during His earthly sojourn, just as transcendental self-consciousness inspires and enables all people’s human knowing. So He fulfilled the will of the Father exactly. And perhaps because of His Resurrection, His human knowledge

even in a conceptual way may be being perfected throughout all eternity to conceptually contain the infinite knowledge of Himself as a Person of the Trinity. In His Resurrection and Ascension, He carried all that is human into heaven, including human consciousness. Perhaps in the case of Christ, a human being's consciousness, on the side of objective knowledge, will be eternally growing in apprehension of a Divine self-consciousness that this Person had completely and thoroughly from the first instant of His incarnation.

#### 4.12 Areas for Further Study

This dissertation has been an attempt to understand the consciousness of Jesus Christ in the episode of the conversation with the Scribe and in the light of Lonergan's understanding of self-consciousness. We have seen that using Lonergan's insight into self-consciousness we can have some understanding of how Christ could be **both** limited in his human consciousness **and** also at the same time have infinite consciousness of his nature and stature.

Areas of further work might include how the incarnation is played out with other human faculties, such as the will. Does Lonergan's understanding of the consciousness of human beings have application to the Divine and human faculties of the will in the incarnate Lord? Lonergan

takes as an assumption that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all understand, judge, will and choose.<sup>130</sup> How then does the human nature of Christ relate to the will of the Divine Persons? Just as the idea that in the wonder of the Incarnation a Divine Person truly and really becomes humanly conscious is a tremendous and awesome mystery, so is the idea that in the wonder of the Incarnation, a human will becomes completely and absolutely congruent to the Divine Will and wills only that and all of that which God wills. And this without any loss of distinction or freedom!

Another area of inquiry that might be pursued is the question of Christ's faith. Did Christ as a human being have to have faith? Could Christ the man have a special kind of faith as a result of his transcendental knowledge of self? Would this make faith easier for him, or would easy faith make him somehow less human? The act of faith is not a completely intellectual endeavor, but it has intellectual components. Does Christ's absolutely perfect knowledge of Himself affect the act of faith in any significant way?

Another interesting area of further study is to delineate exactly how transcendental consciousness of the self relates with or interfaces with the conceptual activities of a knowing being. How exactly is the circuitry wired

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<sup>130</sup> *O&P*, p. 195.

between the transcendental self-consciousness and the empirical understanding? We have said that Lonergan sees that transcendental consciousness is to human knowledge as heat is to fire. But exactly how does that work? How is it for example that the human ability to know exists in such disparate doses? If on the transcendental side we are all open to the infinite, why is it that many of us are so much more limited than others, or perhaps more gifted than others, in native intelligence.

The specific focus of this dissertation on the passage of Mark 12: 28-34 as an instance of Jewish-Christian dialogue points out how there is here an inspiration for approaching the pressing issues of today. One of the most pressing issues facing the Church and the Churches today is the relationship between Christians and Jews. The way we interpret the New Testament must be a source of inspiration for our ongoing dialogue with the Jewish people; it cannot be an obstacle. If we read the New Testament uncritically it can become an obstacle or a hindrance to Jewish-Christian dialogue. A correct interpretation of the New Testament can foster deeper and more genuine understanding and cooperation between Christians and Jews. We must realize that episodes in the New Testament are parts of a “historical chain of interpretation” and must be correctly understood to show that polemics in some passages should well be de-emphasized and efforts at

reconciliation in other passages (such as Mark 12:28-34) should be more deeply appreciated. We would do well to understand more carefully the passages such as we have studied to engender a new rhetoric of reconciliation with our Jewish brothers and sisters.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps the most important area for further work is precisely the need to recognize the lack of recognition for the Jewish contribution to Christianity and the lack of recognition and respect for rabbinic (read *scribal*) Judaism's contribution to the development of our own faith. I hope that this dissertation may have been one small step in that direction.<sup>132</sup>

We seek to understand the revelation of God, and the revelation of God has as its summit the Person of Jesus Christ. Any person, and especially the Person of Jesus Christ, is a mystery. Revelation is not just the transmission of data but the gift of a person. All persons are subjects. No subject can be known as an object. The gift of God's love is not something that "results from or is conditioned by our objective knowledge of God... the gift of God may precede our knowledge of God and may even be the cause of our seeking knowledge of God... and that gift by itself would be an orientation toward the infinite... an orientation that is all consuming,

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<sup>131</sup> McDonald, JIH "Interpreting the New Testament in the Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue Today," in *Studies in World Christianity*, 1995, 1(1), pp. 26-40.

<sup>132</sup> Bemporad, J and Shevack, M *Our Age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding*. New City Press, Hyde Park, New York, 1996, p. 84.

needing all one's heart, and all one's soul, and all one's mind, and all one's strength... an orientation to a transcendent, infinitely lovable mystery!<sup>133</sup>”

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<sup>133</sup> This is a slight paraphrase of Lonergan's quoting Mark 12:28-34 and using the four terms of Jesus Himself. Lonergan, *BJF Method in Theology*. Herder and Herder, New York, 1972, p. 341.

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