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THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY IN MARK

Francis D. Alvarez, S.J.

> Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. (Mk. 11:15–18)

A Prophetic Act?

Isaiah walked naked and barefoot as a sign that the king of Assyria would lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles,"both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered" (Isa. 20:1–4). Jeremiah shattered a potter's jug in front of the elders and priests of Jerusalem as a sign that God would break the city and its people (Jer. 19:1–13). Ezekiel, using a series of actions that ranged from building a miniature of Jerusalem sieged to burning and scattering his hair, prophesied against the house of Israel (Ezek. 4–5). Can Jesus' actions in Mk. 11:15–17 be read in the same vein as those prophetic acts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel?

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Mark uses "Christ" almost like a surname for Jesus (Mk. 1:1). When Jesus asked his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter declared "You are the Messiah," Jesus' response was to order them sternly not to tell anyone (Mk. 1:29–30). Jesus then began to teach them that he "must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31). This was the first time Jesus predicted his passion, death, and resurrection, and this was a most explicit disclosure of what kind of Messiah Jesus was to be. It is clear that "Christ" or "Messiah" is central in Mark's presentation of Jesus. But we must keep this in tension with the other lenses Mark gives us to see Jesus: Son of God, Son of David, and Son of Man, to name a few. The whole matter enters a deeper level not only when we acknowledge how these ways of seeing Jesus overlap but more so when we take into account Jesus' own words: "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak … no one puts new wine into old wineskins" (Mk. 2:21–22). The old categories may be helpful as starting points, but we cannot just force Jesus into them. New wine must be poured into new wineskins.

Mark certainly portrays Jesus as more than a prophet, but Jesus is also presented with distinctively prophetic characteristics. During his baptism, Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and heard a voice from heaven (Mk. 1:9–11). These events are similar to the prophetic commissioning of Isaiah who experienced a heavenly vision and also heard the voice of the Lord (Isa. 6:1–8). Ezekiel, too, received visions as the heavens were opened before him (Ezek. 1).

The Spirit descending on Jesus in Mk. 1:10 can be read messianically especially in the light of Isa. 11:1–2 ("A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse … the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him …"), but it can also be read prophetically. Adela Yarbro Collins sees in Jesus' endowment with the Spirit a prophetic installation as when Elisha was endowed with Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs. 2:9, 15).[1] Elijah's call of Elisha in

[1]Adela Yarbro Collins & Harold W. Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 46.

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1 Kgs. 19:19–21 can also be likened to Jesus' call of his first disciples in Mk. 1:16–20. Both Elijah and Jesus take the initiative: those who are called are in the middle of pursuing their livelihood—plowing a field and casting or mending nets. Elisha left his mother and father behind, and James and John left their father, Zebedee, and Elisha's remark to Elijah, "I will follow you" (1 Kgs. 19:20), is mirrored by the Markan comment "And they followed him" (Mk. 1:20).[2] As Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian (2 Kgs. 5), Jesus cleansed the leper in Mk. 1:40–45. As Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17:17–24) and Elisha the son of the Shunammite (2 Kgs. 4:8–37) from the dead, so Jesus restored the daughter of Jairus to life (Mk. 5:22–43). As Elisha multiplied loaves to feed a hundred people (2 Kgs. 4:42–44), Jesus satisfied an even greater number twice (Mk. 6:35–44 and 8:1–10). Elisha cursing the boys who jeered at him in Bethel (2 Kgs. 2:23–25) can also remind us of Jesus cursing a fig tree that had no fruit (Mk. 11:12–14, 20–21).

Jesus may not have used the messenger formula ("Thus says Yahweh" or "Thus says the Lord God") of the classical prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,[3] but much of his speech falls under the prophetic categories Rudolf Bultmann classified as "preaching of salvation" (for example, Mk. 8:35 and 10:29–30), "minatory sayings" (Mk. 8:12, 38; 10:23, 25; and 12:38–40), "admonitions" (Mk. 1:15 and 13:33–37), and "apocalyptic predictions" (Mk. 9:1, 12–13; 13:2, 5–31; 14:58; 15:29).[4]

Jesus also foretells his passion, death, and resurrection (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32–34). He predicts that his disciples will abandon him (Mk. 14:27) and that Peter will deny him (Mk. 14:30). He also displays clairvoyant abilities in instructing his disciples how to prepare for his

[2]Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 48.

[3]See Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 98–128.

[4]See Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 108–125.

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entry into Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1–7) and for the Passover (Mk. 14:12–16). Jesus is able to discern the future like the prophets of old.[5]

Jesus' deeds and words are signs to the reader that he can be counted as a prophet. The people of Jesus' time are also reported to have regarded him as a prophet (Mk. 6:15; 8:28). Moreover, in giving an explanation why the people in Nazareth rejected him, Jesus said, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house" (Mk. 6:4). Thus, Jesus also saw himself as a prophet. Finally, and most relevant to this study, the Markan Jesus' acts in the temple can be interpreted as prophetic because Jesus uses the words of the prophets Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11) to shed light on what he did.

Possible Interpretations of Jesus' Temple Actions

The temple that Jesus supposedly "cleansed," though existing during what has been designated as the second-temple period, was actually the third temple. Known as the Herodian temple, as it was Herod the Great who rebuilt it on an expanded temple platform beginning in 20–19 BCE, this third temple was truly monumental, containing the sanctuary, courts, gates, approaches, porticoes, subsidiary buildings, and even the fortress Antonia.[6] When the whole project was finally finished in 63 CE, it was one of the largest complexes in the ancient world. It is estimated that the sacred precincts extended to an area of 144,000 square meters.[7]

[5]The presentation above of Jesus as a prophet is guided by Collins' own treatment of the topic. See Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 44–53.

[6]Carol Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 365.

[7]Meir Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, trans. Ina Friedman (Jerusalem: Harper Collins, 1985), 77.

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As Sanders points out, Jesus' action in the temple could not have stopped all buying and selling for this would have required an army.[8] Some scholars propose that Jesus' followers must have also joined his demonstration, but this is not found in the text. Jesus' temple act would not have been substantial enough, therefore, to disrupt the daily routine for an extended period of time, or else he would have been arrested right on the spot.[9] Thus, the significance of Jesus' actions in the temple must be based not on what they were immediately able to accomplish but on what they must have stood for. And what did they symbolize?

Was Jesus making a stand for Gentiles? Interpretations that take this direction focus on the words "house of prayer for all nations" (Mk. 11:17, from Isa. 56:7). To add credence to this reading, scholars situate Jesus' temple act in the Court of the Gentiles, pointing out that the Greek word rendered as "temple" in Mk. 11:15–17 is ἱερόν (temple precincts) and not ναός (the temple building itself or the sanctuary). Did Jesus expel the traders to reclaim the space for the Gentiles and give them a place to pray? But the designation "Court of the Gentiles" did not exist during Jesus' or Mark's time.[10] Josephus' *Antiquities*, his *Jewish Wars*, and the *Mishne Midoth*, all of which have detailed descriptions of the Herodian temple, do not mention the "Court of the Gentiles" or refer to the outer courts as such. Even when the designation is used later on in history, it is not meant positively or to afford the Gentiles a special place. The "Court of the Gentiles" has a negative meaning: it is the area beyond which Gentiles cannot go.

The Markan Jesus does exhibit concern for Gentiles. He healed the Syrophoenician woman's daughter, albeit after hesitating at first (Mk. 7:24–30). This encounter seems to have opened Jesus to reaching out to the Gentiles. He healed a deaf man in the district of Tyre (Mk. 7:31–37) shortly thereafter. The feeding of the four thousand

[8]E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 70.

[9]Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 70.

[10]Solomon Zeitlin, "There Was No Court of Gentiles in the Temple Area," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (July 1965): 88.

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(Mk. 8:1–10), especially when compared to the earlier feeding of the five thousand (Mk. 6:34–44) and its Jewish-centric details, is read by many commentators as an extension of Jesus' ministry to all nations. But up to this point, the drama and the tension in Mark have been steadily building up. Opposition to Jesus has been increasing and coming closer to him. There are also those three ominous predictions of his passion in "the Way section" (Mk. 8:22–10:52) which serve to warn the reader of impending danger. Jesus' concern for the Gentiles, which as presented is limited to Mk. 7:24–8:10 (just 24 verses), seems out of place at this stage of the story and does not seem to merit such a pivotal position in the narrative.

Was Jesus demonstrating against unfair and opportunistic trade practices? Interpretations of the temple incident that see it thus emphasize the words "den of robbers" (Mk. 11:17, from Jer. 7:11). It is not too difficult to imagine, as some studies suggest, that the sellers and money changers fleeced the pilgrims to the Jerusalem temple and took advantage of them. Those in charge of the temple probably knew this and, beyond tacit approval, also gave it their support—for a cut of the profits, as we can again easily imagine. While this is plausible, the text does not bear witness to it, and the theme of corruption is not such a major concern in Mark that it would be the focus of as critical a pericope as the temple controversy. Moreover, if Jesus were against any overcharging or even swindling that was happening, why would he drive out not only the sellers but the buyers as well?

Was Jesus purifying the temple from the defilement of all trade, whether honest or not? This would explain the evacuation of *both* the buyers and sellers. It would also explain why Jesus stopped the transport of σκεῦος through the temple. σκεῦος is translated as "anything" in Mk. 11:16, but it can also be translated as vessel and what merchants used to hold their money. It can also refer to the money bags of those who used the temple as a bank[11]—as many temples in

[11]John R. Donahue & Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina Vol. 2, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 328.

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the ancient world also functioned. But the text does not really focus on commercialism in the temple.

The trade that went on in the temple was actually essential to the cult. Pilgrims, some coming from great distances, could hardly be expected to bring their own animals to be sacrificed. Not only would sheep, oxen, pigeons, turtledoves, and the like be very inconvenient to bring on long trips, there was a great possibility that these would be blemished along the way and be rejected by the priests as not fit for sacrifice. The money changers performed an important service as well because they provided pilgrims with the standard Tyrian coinage acceptable for paying the half-shekel temple tax.[12] Jesus' actions in the temple should therefore be seen as not only against the buyers, sellers, and money changers, but all the daily activities in the temple which the buyers, sellers, and money changers were participating in. But was Jesus against sacrifice and all other temple practices?

This does not seem to be the case because in Mk. 1:44–45, he tells the leper he just healed to go to the temple, show himself to the priests, and offer for his cleansing what Moses prescribed in Lev. 14:2–32. It can be argued, however, that seeing Mk. 1:40–45 in this light is only a shallow reading. Some manuscripts have Jesus in Mk. 1:41 not moved with pity but with anger. The anger could have been at

> the Jerusalem priestly establishment and their institutionalized procedures and prescribed offering for the "leper" to be free of the stigma (clean). Since Jesus already made the man clean, his instructions must be intended either as a demonstrative testimony or "witness" against the priest and the costly offerings required by their code.[13]

A better argument for Jesus not being against temple offerings can be seen in his high regard for the widow in Mk. 12:41–44. Jesus had just denounced the scribes for devouring the houses of widows

[12]Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 64–65.

[13]Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60 (New Testament).

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in Mk. 12:40. Joseph Fitzmyer has compiled a list of what this could have meant:

a. Scribes accepted payment for legal aid to widows, even though such payment was forbidden.
b. Scribes cheated widows of what was rightly theirs; as lawyers, they were acting as guardians appointed by a husband's will to care for the widow's estate.
c. Scribes sponged on the hospitality of these women of limited means, like the gluttons and gourmands mentioned in Assumptions of Moses 7:6 ("devourers of the goods of the poor, saying that they do so on the basis of their justice").
d. Scribes mismanaged the property of widows like Anna who had dedicated themselves to the service of the Temple.
e. Scribes took large sums of money from credulous old women as a reward for the prolonged prayer which they professed to make on their behalf.
f. Scribes took the houses as pledges for debts which could not be paid.[14]

As much as Jesus saw the injustice being played right before him, Jesus did not stop the widow from putting her two small coins into the treasury. Instead, Jesus praised her.

One final piece of evidence that Jesus was not against temple sacrifice is that his disciples and himself ate the Passover meal "on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed" (Mk. 14:12–16). Even though a lamb is not mentioned in the Last Supper, the Passover meal would not have been complete without it. And the only place in Jerusalem where the lambs could be slaughtered at this time was the temple.

[14]Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible, Vol. 28A (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1318.

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Was Jesus symbolizing the destruction of the temple? This is Sanders' position. He centers on the image of "overturning" tables and seats and links this with Jesus' prophecy about the temple being destroyed in Mk. 13:1ff: "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."[15] But as Sanders himself notes, one objection to this is that overturning furniture is not an obvious symbol of destruction. C. F. D. Moule points to the broken pot in Jer. 19:10 as a better possible sign. Also, if the meaning of Jesus' acts can be seen in his prediction of the temple's destruction, why was this prophecy not reported right after the temple event? Why did Mark wait for two chapters before recounting this? It is the conflation of Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11 (in Mk. 11:17) that is put right after Jesus' acts, and so this passage must be used to interpret what the Markan Jesus meant to do.

The possible readings of the temple controversy presented above are not exhaustive of all scholarly positions, but they are representative of what this study calls "minimal" interpretations. They are "minimal" because while they are based on the text, they limit their views to the temple scene and the episodes proximate to it. As a result, they also prove unsatisfactory. What is needed, especially for a difficult text such as the temple controversy, is a "maximal" interpretation, one that considers the thrusts and themes of the whole Gospel and opens up to a more integrated view.

Towards a Maximal Interpretation

A maximal interpretation is one that considers one part of the narrative in the greater context of the whole story. Thus, it is the position of this study that the "cleansing of the temple" is not merely a cleansing and not only about the temple. The temple is not usually listed in commentaries as a major motif in Mark's Gospel. In fact, the first mention of the temple comes only in Mk. 11:11. It does play a prominent part from then on, but to introduce a new theme only in

[15]Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 70–76.

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the last third of a narrative does not speak well of a storyteller's art and skill. The point of the scenes involving the temple must therefore already be found early in the Gospel, perhaps even in the beginning. It must lie in many other parts throughout the Gospel and must also be seen when the Gospel is taken as a whole.

This maximal approach can also be applied analogously to the way this study will treat Mark's allusions to Hebrew Scripture and other texts from the second temple period. This essay will also examine the Jewish texts echoed in Mark in their wider context. Atomistic exegesis, "which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words, independently of the context or the historical occasion,"[16] was a rabbinic practice and is part of the Jewish tradition of *midrash*. With Christianity's roots being located in Judaism, it would be logical to assume that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament writers would resemble to some extent those of then contemporary Jewish exegeses.[17] Is it valid then to go back to the larger contexts of Jewish texts when they appear? There are also examples of contextual Jewish exegeses; we should not too hastily conclude that the Jews used texts only in one way. David Instone Brewer demonstrates this with quite a number of examples of contextual Jewish exegeses.[18]

So how do we know whether a particular use of a Jewish text in Mark is an example of contextual or non-contextual exegesis? How do we know whether to go back to an allusion's larger context or not? We take a clue from Donald Juel's approach in *Messiah and the Temple*: if a particular allusion to a Jewish text does not seem to fit well in its new

[16]George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 248.

[17]Richard N. Longenecker, "Who is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament's Use of the Old," *Themelios* (October & November 1987): 7.

[18]See David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

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setting, we will examine the original context of the Jewish allusion.[19] If going back to the original context of a Jewish allusion sheds more light on its new setting, how can we just ignore what it gives us to ponder?

As will be shown, Mark's use of Jewish texts will always be better understood when these texts are seen in their original contexts. Following Timothy Gray, we will consider Mark's use of Jewish Scripture as more than just examples of atomistic exegesis but instances of metalepsis, a literary method of evoking the wider meaning of an earlier text by striking a resonance through a brief citation.[20] Thus, while only a phrase is quoted, we will also look into the context of the verse where it originally appears.

The Kingdom of God

We begin our maximal interpretation by going back to what many exegetes have pointed to as the "thesis statement" of Mark's Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near (or is at hand); repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk. 1:15).

The words above, which the Markan Jesus spoke at the start of his ministry, situate him squarely in an eschatological context.[21] Eschatology literally means words or concepts about the last or final things, but Jewish eschatology is not about the end of the world. That would make no sense in the Jewish worldview,[22] for how would God's promises be fulfilled then?

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[19]See this approach at work in Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), 133.

[20]Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 5.

[21]Donahue & Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 37.

[22]N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God Vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 285.

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Jewish eschatology is centered on the faithfulness of God to his covenant with Israel. The basis of this covenant is the set of promises given to the patriarchs ("I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" [Gen. 12:2; see also Gen. 15, 17, 22, and so on]). This set of promises was initially fulfilled with the Exodus (Ex. 2:24ff), ratified at Sinai (Ex. 19–24),[23] found blossoming with David and the blessing given to his house (2 Sam. 7), challenged in exile in Babylon, and seemingly restored upon the return of God's people to Jerusalem. But the Jews during Jesus' time would have been in a dilemma: if God had made a covenant with them, why were they in their current state? It had been many years since they were released from Babylon, but though they were back in their land, they were still in an exile of oppression under foreign overlords. Still, Israel held on with hope. Jewish eschatology looks to the future. If there is anything final in Jewish eschatology, it is a final future, the advent of an age that will last and never be supplanted.

A part of N. T. Wright's summary of the Jewish worldview as seen in second-temple literature is as follows:

a. Israel's God was indeed going to fulfill the covenant. The hope is never abandoned (Dan. 9:16; Neh. 9:8; Joel 2:15–32; Ps. Sol. 9; Bar. 5:9; etc.).

b. This will result in re-establishing the divinely intended order in all the world (Isa. 40–55; Dan. 7; Tob. 13–14, etc.).[24]

The kingdom of God is one way of talking about the re-establishment of the divine order that fulfills the covenant. Reflection on eschatology in the New Testament has privileged the image of kingdom of God (or kingdom of Heaven, a circumlocution in the Gospel of Matthew) and validly so because this expression is mentioned 122 times in it, with ninety-nine of those occurrences in the synoptic

[23]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 260–261.

[24]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 271.

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Gospels. In Mark alone, there are fourteen references to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God should not be understood as primarily spatial, territorial, or political. Going back to the Greek βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, we note that "βασιλεία" is more active and dynamic than the static "kingdom." βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ refers more to the "reigning" or "living rule" of God as well as the conditions for his reign.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the good news" is a programmatic statement. It sets Jesus' mission for the rest of the Gospel. As many scholars have said, *everything* that Jesus does and says is a proclamation that the kingdom of God has come near. If this is so, then Jesus' demonstration in the temple must also be read as a prophetic act preaching the kingdom of God.

The prophetic acts mentioned early in this essay all have connections with the message they were trying to convey: walking naked as a sign of being led away as poor and defeated captives; a broken jug symbolizing a city destroyed; hair scattered and burned like a people dispersed and reduced to nothing. How can driving out buyers and sellers, overturning tables and chairs, and preventing the transport of vessels signify the coming of a kingdom?

A Different Image

The kingdom of God is a privileged way of talking about eschatology, but it is only one way of talking about it. In all the many times the kingdom of God is discussed and described in the Gospels, it is never really precisely defined. This may be because the kingdom of God is elusive, or perhaps it is the hope, the promise, and the mystery that the kingdom of God is trying to capture that is even more elusive: eschatology.

To better connect the temple event to eschatology, this study proposes a different focal image. We do not have to look far for this alternative metaphor. Reading Mark's "thesis statement" as an instance

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of synonymous parallelism, a common device in poetic Hebrew texts, we already have another way of stating that the kingdom of God is at hand: "The time is fulfilled." How time, season, age, era, or καιρὸς can be a better way of understanding Jesus' temple act will be developed below.

Before anything else, though, it must be emphasized that this study is not proposing to replace "kingdom of God." Rather, it is pushing another image to be considered alongside it. We saw earlier how Mark presents many different images of Jesus, some overlapping with others but with no single image capturing Jesus perfectly. Similarly, we have many different images of eschatology: new creation, covenant fulfillment, blessings given, deliverance, liberation, new exodus, restoration, the day of the Lord, kingdom of God, and so on. All these images approximate but never fully encapsulate what is hoped for in eschatology. This is because eschatology refers to a time in the future when the course of history will be changed—no one knows exactly when or precisely how—to such an extent that there is an entirely new state of reality about which the only thing certain is that it is new.[25] Proposing a different image will perhaps remind us again that the kingdom of God is not static. Proposing a different image will perhaps allow us to recover some of the dynamism the metaphor of the kingdom of God has lost.

The Aspect of Time in Mark

Is time a valid theme with which to interpret and integrate Mark? καιρὸς is mentioned only in Mk. 1:15, 11:13, and 13:33, but its second occurrence, when Mark comments that it was not the season or καιρὸς for figs, is very relevant in our discussion of the temple controversy (see below).

We are alerted to the importance of the aspect of time from Mk. 1:1: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of

[25]David L. Petersen, "Eschatology," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 575.

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God." In this study, we will take the position that "beginning" here does not just refer to the witness of John the Baptist (Mk. 1:2–8) or only to the prologue of Mark (Mk. 1:1–13 or, as some outlines have it, Mk. 1:1–15). We will take "beginning" here in conjunction with understanding good news, gospel, or εὐαγγέλιον in the same way that Paul, the earliest Christian writer in the New Testament, proclaims it in Rom. 1:3–4: "the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." For Paul, more often than not, the content of the good news is the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. As Brendan Byrne explains:

> If, for Paul—and presumably other Christian writers and preachers before Mark—the core content of "the Gospel" was the good news about God's raising of Jesus and the establishment of his messianic reign through the Spirit (Rom. 1:3–4), what Mark could be saying, then [with "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"], at the start of his work is: "You believe the basic good news about Jesus the Crucified One: how God raised him from the dead and revealed him to be the Messiah and Son of God. Now I am going to tell you how Jesus anticipated his postresurrection messianic reign in his teaching and activity up to and including his death on the cross. In other words, I am going to tell you how it all *began*."[26]

The whole of Mark therefore can be seen as a process of inauguration, the establishment of a new period. To this, we can add R. Alan Culpepper's insight on beginnings: "To make a beginning is to divide time, to place a marker that says one era has ended and another one has begun."[27]

"Gospel" or "good news" or "εὐαγγέλιον" also connotes a new age. In the Greek-speaking world of Mark, εὐαγγέλιον (or εὐαγγέλια, the plural form in which it more commonly appears) is used in formal

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[26]Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 24.

[27]R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary Vol. 20 (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2007), 64.

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announcements of marriage, anniversaries, and in the proclamation of the accession or birth of rulers and emperors. An inscription from Priene in Asia Minor dating back to 9 B.C.E. states:

> … the birthday of the god (Caesar Augustus) has been for the whole world the beginning of the gospel (εὐαγγέλια); concerning him, therefore, let all reckon a new era beginning from the date of his birth.[28]

Seeing Jesus as a prophet also builds up eschatological anticipations and indicates the beginning of a new age. For Israel, prophecy declined and then ceased sometime after the Babylonian exile. But in the second temple period, the notion that prophecy was a thing of the past somehow combined with the expectation that the end of the present tribulation and the coming redemption would be accompanied by the return of prophets.[29]

"Kingdom of God" may outnumber references to καιρὸς by a big margin, but another expression related to time occurs almost three times more frequently than βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in the Gospel according to Mark: εὐθὺς, which appears forty-one times. Translated most of the time as "immediately," εὐθὺς "lends the sense of everything proceeding at breathless haste—the unstoppable unfolding of a divine project."[30] Even βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ has a time aspect: the kingdom of God is *when* God rules. This ties in quite neatly with the concept of good news in Isa. 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" What is good news is when God reigns. Benedict XVI asserts that the kingdom of God is an "event" unfolding in history in a new way beginning with Jesus' proclamation of the good news. Jesus' message is that "God is acting *now* [emphasis added]—this is the hour when

[28]See Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, 6.

[29]Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 44.

[30]Collins & Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, 30.

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God is showing himself in history as its Lord, as the Living God, in a way that goes beyond anything seen before."[31]

Finally, the aspect of time is very much appropriate for discussing the temple controversy because, as will be shown, the Old Testament texts alluded to in connection with Jesus' temple demonstration are about the coming day of the Lord and the day of judgment.

The Old Age and the New

Eschatology includes a duality between the present time and the time to come. The new age signals the end of the old, and this is one way of seeing Jesus' ministry—as a sign that the final future has come.

Jesus' first miracle in Mark is the cure of the demoniac (Mk. 1:21–28). This is significant because with this act, Jesus is showing that the age of captivity to demons has ended. Eschatology involves the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. With his exorcisms (see Mk. 5:1–20; 7:24–30; and 9:14–29, to name a few)—and it is in Mark that Jesus performs the most number of exorcisms, he communicates that God's victory is at hand; the age of fulfillment has come.

It is a similar message that is in the cure of Simon's mother-in-law (Mk. 1:29–31), the many sick in Capernaum (Mk. 1:32–34), the woman with a hemorrhage (5:25–34), and Jairus' daughter: the time of captivity to affliction—and even death—is over; a new time is beginning.

When Jesus heals the paralytic (Mk. 2:1–12) and the man with a withered hand (Mk. 3:1–6), when he opens the ears and removes the speech impediment of the deaf and dumb man (Mk. 7:31–37), when he restores the sight of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22–26) and Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46–52), Jesus is fulfilling the Isaian prophecy of the return of the redeemed and the time of their restoration:

[31]Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 56.

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Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees …
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. (Isa. 35:3, 5–6)

When Jesus touches and cleanses the leper (Mk. 1:40–45), eats with sinners and tax collectors (Mk. 2:13–17), and engages in debates about purity laws (Mk. 7:1–23), he signals the end of the old age and the old division between being clean and unclean. When he heals on the Sabbath (Mk. 3:1–6) and teaches that "the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:23–28) and challenges Jewish tradition (Mk. 7:8–13), he is proclaiming the end of a particular way of interpreting the Torah. When he redefines what family means (Mk. 3:31–35), he is marking the beginning of something new. And when he forgives (Mk. 2:1–12), he is saying that the time of slavery to sin is over.

Jesus also ends the old understanding of what the Messiah is in his predictions of his passion (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32–34) and shows them, in the verses immediately following, a new way of greatness in the new age of the kingdom (Mk. 8:34–38; 9:33–37; 10:35–45).

The Temple

All the words and deeds listed above bring us to the point of the narrative when Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem and the temple. Are not the events and signs above already sufficient in proclaiming the close of the old age and the opening of the new? What does the incident in the temple add? Eschatological thought believes that God will act *definitively* to end the time of old and begin the prophesied new era. For the Jews, there is no more dramatic place to stage a definitive demonstration than the temple.

The temple was at the heart of every aspect of Jewish life. Its importance cannot be overestimated. Shmuel Safrai writes:

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> In the eyes of the people, it constituted primarily the divine dwelling-place of the God of Israel which set them apart from other nations … the offering of sacrifices and the ritual cleansing involved atoned for the individual transgressions and served as a framework for his spiritual elevation and purification …. The temple, its vessels and even the high priest's vestments were depicted as representing the entire universe and the heavenly hosts …. With the destruction of the temple, the image of the universe was rendered defective.[32]

The temple was at the religious, national, political, and even economic core of Israel. It was a synecdoche for Israel. Thus, it became the focal point of many controversies during the second temple period.[33] And when Jesus held his demonstration in the temple, it must have been considered an attack on the whole of Israel. No wonder then that Israel's leaders conspired to put him to death after the temple incident.[34]

We are now ready to deal with the texts directly connected to the temple controversy.

The Entry into Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1–10)

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem must be part of our treatment of the temple event first because of the temporal proximity of the entry to the temple demonstration. The close relationship between Jerusalem and the temple can also be seen in the text which strings together

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[32]Shmuel Safrai, "The Temple," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions*, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Vol. 2, eds. S. Safrai & M. Stern in cooperation with D. Flusser & W. C. van Unnik (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 904–906.

[33]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 225.

[34]The Sabbath can also be considered a synecdoche for all the commands and statutes of God. It is noteworthy that after Jesus violated the Sabbath (Mk. 3:1–5), "the Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mk. 3:6).

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the two: "Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple …" (Mk. 11:11); "Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple …" (Mk. 11:15); and "Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple …" (Mk. 11:27).

Wright describes Jerusalem and the temple:

> When we study the city-plan of ancient Jerusalem, the significance of the temple stands out at once, since it occupies a phenomenally large proportion (about 25%) of the entire city. Jerusalem was not, like Corinth for example, a large city with lots of little temples dotted here and there. It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it.[35]

Jerusalem is a metonymy for the temple and vice-versa. Psalm 78:68–69 tells of how God chose Mount Zion for his sanctuary, and Zion later came to refer to Jerusalem, the temple-city. Lam. 2:6–8 uses "Fair Zion" and "Jerusalem" interchangeably.[36] The main point of what happens as Jesus enters Jerusalem can be projected to the main point of what happens when Jesus clears the temple precincts.

Part of the oracle in Zech. 9 prophesies:

> Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
> Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
> Lo, your king comes to you;
> triumphant and victorious is he,
> humble and riding on a donkey,
> on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zech. 9:9)

The allusion to Zech 9:9 is more explicit in Matthew's account of the entry into Jerusalem, but it is also found in Mark's, as seen when Jesus comes riding on a colt (Mk. 11:7) and the people shout aloud (Mk. 11:9).

Zech. 9:9–17 paints the image of the coming ruler of Israel. It is replete with eschatological hope as it looks forward to "that day" (Zech. 9:16) when the Lord *will* save them (again Zech. 9:16), when the

[35]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 225.

[36]See Jon D. Levenson, "Zion Traditions," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6, 1098. In a further development of the metonymy between the temple and Jerusalem, Zion was later also used to refer to the people of Israel.

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Lord *will* appear over them and the Lord God *will* sound the trumpet (Zech. 9:14), when the Lord of hosts *will* protect them (Zech. 9:15). "That day" is a shortened reference to "the day of the Lord." And all of this should remind us of Mark's programmatic statement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

The people shout, "Hosanna," which can be translated as "Save *now*!" The aspect of time is again present as Jesus is praised as ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the one who comes or the one coming in the name of the Lord (Mk. 11:9). Mark has pointed to Jesus before in the same manner. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus and spoke of him as the one more powerful who is coming (Mk. 1:7). In the entry into Jerusalem, the one who is coming is announced as finally come.

The crowds are correct in their proclamation in Mk. 11:9: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (from Ps. 118:26). Jesus is the one who is coming, and he comes in the name of the Lord. But they show their misunderstanding of Jesus in Mk. 11:10: "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" Jesus' message is all about the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of David, which has a political and nationalistic ring to it.[37]

The First Visit to the Temple (Mk. 11:11)

The first part of Mal. 3:1, "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me," has already been fulfilled in Mark with John the Baptist's ministry. Jesus' first visit to the temple accomplishes the second part: "… and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple." Mal. 3:1–7 is yet another passage that is in the context of eschatology. It is again about the day of coming. But for Malachi, this is not a day of glory. Amos, the first prophet to announce "the day of the Lord," warned that this would not be a day of light but of darkness for Israel (Am. 5:18). Similarly, in Malachi 3, the "day" is a day of judgment: "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who

[37]Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 21.

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can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap …. Then I will draw near to you for judgment …" (Mal. 3:2, 5).

What Jesus does when he "suddenly comes to his temple" may seem anti-climactic at first. After the heightening tension in the Way section and the big build-up in the entry into Jerusalem, Jesus enters the temple and just looks around. Some scholars say that Mark puts this pause here so that he can insert the cursing of the fig tree (which is the next scene) and have one of his trademark intercalations. Some guess that Jesus needed to look around the temple precincts so that he can plan his demonstration the next day. Some think that to look around was all Jesus could do because, as the text says, it was already late. Perhaps the merchants and the crowds had already gone home. But consider more deeply Jesus' actions: he looks around at everything—it is what a judge would do. The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. And the judgment will not be all blessing and light. Quite poetically, it is already [too] late (Mk. 11:11).

The Fig Tree Cursed (Mk. 11:12–14)

The judgment glimpsed in Jesus' actions the day before now becomes clearer in the scene with the fig tree. First of all, the fig tree figures in the prophetic books often in passages with an eschatological import. In Micah 4, when the mountain of the Lord's house is established as the highest of mountains in the days to come (v. 1), all shall "sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees" (v. 4). In Zechariah 3, when the Lord brings his servant, the Branch, and removes the guilt of the land (vv. 8–9), the people shall invite each other to come and sit under the vine and fig tree (v. 10). The blossoming of the fig tree and its being found with fruit is depicted when God visits his people with blessing (see Deut. 8:7–8; 1 Kgs. 4:24–25; and 1 Macc. 14:12). But the withering of the fig tree and its lack of fruit is portrayed when God comes in judgment (see Jer. 8:13; Hos. 2:12; and Isa. 34:4). In Am. 8:1–3, the link between the fig tree and God's judgment is presented through a pun: the prophet is shown a basket of

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summer fruit (which were dried figs)— קָיִץ (qāyits), which God uses to make Amos say קֵץ (qēts)—the end (of the people Israel).[38]

It has been noted by many exegetes that when Mark intercalates the puzzling incident involving the fig tree and the controversial acts done in the temple, as with his other intercalations (see for example Mk. 5:21–43: the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage; and Mk. 14:53–72: Peter following Jesus to the courtyard, Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Peter denying Jesus), the two stories are supposed to be mutually interpretative. The intercalation of the fig tree and the temple scenes is remarkable because we actually have here a "double sandwich"[39]—Jesus visits the temple for the first time (Mk. 11:11); he curses the fig tree (Mk. 11:12–14); Jesus goes to the temple again (Mk. 11:15–19); the fig tree is seen to have withered (Mk. 11:20–25). This makes the relationship between the fig tree and the temple scenes doubly stronger.

In Mk. 11:12–13, Jesus, hungry, goes to a fig tree in leaf but finds nothing on it. In Mic. 7:1, in the context of judgment (see Mic. 6:9–16), God hungers for first-ripe figs and finds none. Just as the fig tree in leaf (Mk. 11:12) shows signs of life but is actually fruitless, so is the temple. It is bustling with life and activity but in truth produces no fruit.[40] Thus, it will be judged. "May no one ever eat of your fruit again," Jesus says to the fig tree (Mk. 11:14). A fruit tree without fruit is as good as dead; a temple that produces no fruit is as good as ended.

The Markan comment, "It was not the season (καιρὸς) for figs" (Mk. 11:13), may make Jesus look foolish—why would he be looking for figs when there really was not supposed to be any? But the irrationality of the act should be a signal for us: "It was not the season for figs" must

[38]William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980), 134–135.

[39]Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, 178.

[40]J. R. Daniel Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74/3 (July 2012): 509–527.

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be read not as an agricultural statement but as a theological one. First, καιρὸς should again remind us of the theme of time that is prominent in Mark's Gospel (explicitly in Mk. 1:15: "This is the καιρὸς …"). Our brief foray into biblical texts concerning figs showed us that a tree ripe for harvest means eschatological glory and a bare tree is a sign of the season of judgment.[41] The Markan comment in v. 13 prepares us for what will happen in the temple.

The Demonstration in the Temple (Mk. 11:15–17)

When Jesus drives out those buying and selling in the temple (Mk. 11:15), the verb used, ἐκβάλλειν, is the same word that is employed when he expels demons (see Mk. 1:34, 43; 3:15; 9:38 as examples). As was said before, exorcisms are a sign of the end of the old age of captivity and the in-breaking of the new. The clearing of the temple precincts by the expulsion of the buyers and sellers and the overturning of the money changers' tables and the dove sellers' seats (Mk. 11:15–16) can be seen as a fulfillment of Zech. 14:21—"And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day," one description of what will happen on the day of the Lord.

How can we understand "And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple" (Mk. 11:16)? According to the *Mishnah*, "one should not enter the temple mount with his walking stick, his shoes, his money bag, or with dust on his feet. And one should not use [the temple mount] for a shortcut" (*Berakhot* 9:5). Is Jesus just trying to preserve the sacredness of the temple complex? Is this act about purifying the temple? If we relate this though to the fig tree episode, to what happened in the previous scene, and to the withering that will be observed in the next, preservation of sacredness and purification do not fit. The cursing and drying up of the fig tree points to an end. How can we reconcile what happened to the fig tree with Jesus' temple actions?

[41]Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," 521.

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As we did with Jesus' first visit to the temple, let us again imagine what Jesus enacted: he throws out those buying and selling; he interrupts those changing coins and peddling doves; he prevents anyone carrying anything to pass through. In effect, all activity ceases in the area Jesus is able to cover. The temple (represented by the space Jesus occupies) is at a standstill. The way the New Revised Standard Version translates the astonished way the people reacted strengthens the image we have constructed—they are "spellbound" (Mk. 11:18).

This is where we see the advantage of focusing our interpretation on the aspect of καιρὸς and not on the image of kingdom: things ground to a halt in the temple. It was as if time stopped. And this is the meaning of Jesus' temple demonstration: the age of the temple is judged to be ended.

Echoes of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11

Jesus in Mk. 11:17 then teaches, saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Isa. 56:7)'? But you have made it a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11)."[42] How do these two biblical allusions serve to interpret what Jesus has just done? Following the methodology which we have described previously, we will now consider the larger context of these allusions.

Atomistic exegesis can mislead us into thinking that the point of "house of prayer for all nations" is the concern for the Gentiles. But Isa. 56:7 is part of an eschatological vision of God's future intervention to save Israel. It is about a salvation about to come, a justice about to be revealed (Isa. 56:1). A future house of prayer for all who observe what is right, who do what is pleasing to God (vv. 1, 4, 7), is promised

[42]In previous teaching scenes in Mark, what Jesus says is not reported. But his words are usually accompanied by great deeds (for example, see Mk. 1:21–27, where he teaches and then cures the demoniac; Mk. 1:39, where he preaches and expels demons; Mk. 2:1–12, where he interrupts his teaching to heal the paralytic; and so on). Jesus teaches not only with his words but with his deeds. And when a teaching is reported that is close to a mighty deed, we must see it as the interpretation of that deed.

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not only to Israel but to foreigners, eunuchs, and others (see vv. 3–4, 6, and 8).[43] Thus, two signs of the time of fulfillment are a new temple and the gathering of Israel and the Gentiles.

It should be reiterated that in Jesus' time, though the Babylonian exile was over, "the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled. Israel still remained in thrall to foreigners."[44] The temple had been rebuilt twice—by Zerubbabel and, in a much grander fashion, Herod the Great. But there was still an expectation of a future temple other than what they had, and to this future temple peoples from all nations would flock.

This two-fold expectation finds resonance in other texts from the second-temple period. The last chapter of the Book of Tobit, dated by most scholars in the second century B.C.E., presupposes the existence of Zerubbabel's rebuilt temple but still says:

> But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfilment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth …. All the Israelites who are saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice, but those who commit sin and injustice will vanish from all the earth. (Tob. 14:5–7)

This is the real post-exilic restoration of which the previous one (beginning in 538 B.C.E.) was simply a foretaste.[45]

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[43]Some scholars place too much emphasis on the Sabbath observance of the eunuchs and foreigners (vv. 4, 6), but the Sabbath, as mentioned before in another footnote, can just be a synecdoche for all the commands and statutes of the Lord. This can be seen when vv. 4 and 6 are read as examples of synonymous parallelism.

[44]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 269.

[45]Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 270.

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Another example is found in the visions in 1 Enoch, written during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.E.):

> I saw till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than that first, and set it up in the place of the first which had been folded up: all its pillars were new, and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first, the old one which he had taken away. (1 Enoch 90:29)[46]

If one continues reading 1 Enoch 90 until verse 39, we will see all people being drawn to this "new house" and a new humanity formed.

"Jesus' citation of Isa 56:7 should not be read simply as a statement about a desired state of affairs that Jesus did not find when he entered the temple precincts."[47] Yes, there might have been activities there that were, to refer to Isaiah 56, "not right" and "not pleasing to God," but these are not the point of the temple event. The temple scene should have emphasized these activities and what was wrong with them, if that were the case. Instead, we are only left to conjecture about them. But what is emphasized is eschatology. Jesus stops temple activities, symbolizing that he is stopping temple time, and ends the era of this temple to make way for the future. The "shall" in Isa. 56:7 is significant. Herod's temple, no matter how grandiose it was, did not fill the role of God's promised dwelling place with his people. Something else shall.

Culpepper explains what Gray calls metalepsis in this way:

> In order to grasp the full significance of the quotation, one must remember that in the first century, there were no chapter and verse divisions in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that quotation marks, footnotes, and cross references were not yet in use. Therefore, brief quotations of key phrases were often used to evoke the larger context of a familiar passage of Scripture.[48]

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[46] Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* Vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004).

[47] Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," 516.

[48] Culpepper, *Mark*, 379.

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What does the brief quotation of "house of prayer for all nations" evoke? It should remind the reader of a future temple that will fulfill God's covenant—though as we all find out later, not in the way the Jews expected.

Atomistic exegesis of Jer. 7:11 can mislead us into thinking that the point of "den of robbers" is how Jewish leaders have robbed the people in the various ways illustrated before. We can get lost looking for the best way to translate "λῃστῶν." It, after all, was used by Jesus when he was arrested and he asked in Mk. 14:48, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit (λῃστὴν)?" Two revolutionaries (the New American Bible's translation of λῃστάς) or insurrectionists were also crucified with Jesus (Mk. 15:27).

Looking more closely at the text of Mk. 11:17, we see a parallelism between "house of prayer" and "den of thieves"—more pointedly, the parallelism is between "house" and "den."[49] The focus therefore should not be on "prayer" or "robbers" but on the temple.

In Jer. 7:1–15, the focal image is clear in the use of "the Lord's house"; "gate/gates"; "dwell" (three occurrences); "place" (five occurrences); "house, which is called by my name" (three occurrences); den of robbers; and "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." The people of Judah (not just their leaders) have made the temple a place where they can hide after committing abominations. They think that they will be safe there; they have made it something of an idol or a magical charm. Now comes the judgment. God says to the people of Judah, "I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh" (Jer. 7:14).

What should the brief quotation of "den of robbers" evoke? It should remind us of the end of the first temple. Jesus, too, in Mk. 11:15–17, mirroring the judgment on the fruitless fig tree, pronounces judgment

[49]This stands out more when "for all nations" is dropped. Is this why Matthew and Luke, the acknowledged more elegant writers, discard this even if they, too, show Jesus as having concern for the Gentiles?

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on the temple. The chief priests and the scribes hear it as the disciples heard the curse on the fig tree. Jesus' demonstration, to say it again, has symbolized the temple's end.

In summary, Mk. 11:17 brings together two quotes from the prophets that interpret Jesus' temple actions in this way: "The time of this temple has ended. There is a future temple in our horizon."

We have been focusing on the temple in the last few paragraphs, and so we must again remind ourselves that what is at stake here is not just the temple. N. T. Wright compares Jesus' action in the temple to the burning of a flag.[50] When someone burns a flag, he or she is not just incinerating a piece of cloth; he or she is symbolically setting fire to a land, a people, a government, a sovereignty, and all the other narratives implied in the flag. Jesus was passing judgment not just on the temple but on all of Judaism; he was ending not just the time of the temple but everything Israel knew. In Jer. 7:15, the next verse after the judgment on the temple, God says, "And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim." We can read the judgment on the temple and the judgment on the people as synonymous parallels. The end of the temple is also the end of the people—this is also what Jesus symbolized with the temple demonstration. No wonder the Jewish leaders wanted him killed.

The Fig Tree Withered (Mk. 11:20–26)

Even Jeremiah, well known as the prophet of doom, has a book of consolation. Ezekiel as well prophesies the destruction of the temple, but once the temple is destroyed, his message becomes one of promise that the temple will be rebuilt and that God's people will return to Jerusalem. Jesus has just prophetically ended the time of the temple. Will he also point to a new beginning? This is what we see when Jesus and the disciples revisit the fig tree.

[50]N. T. Wright, *The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 62.

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First, they see that the fig tree is "withered to its roots," utterly ended, just like the temple. Another reminder of what happened in the temple is in Mk. 11:23: "Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you." The mountain can be any proverbial mountain, but considering that Jesus and the disciples were walking to Jerusalem and that Jesus used the demonstrative pronoun "this" (τούτῳ), it is possible that Jesus was pointing to the temple mount in Jerusalem. And Jesus, with his prophetic act of judgment the previous day, had symbolically "taken up" the temple mount and "thrown" it into the chaos of the sea.

In Wisdom literature, different sayings and proverbs can be grouped together without logical development and with only the verbal association as the connection. Is this also true for the seemingly disparate and loosely related exhortations about faith, prayer, and forgiveness in Mk. 11:22–25? Kirk reminds us of the integral part so far of Isa. 56:7 in the prophecy of the temple's end.[51] What eschatological temple will replace the existing one? What will be the new house of prayer for all peoples? It is the position of this writer that the community of disciples will be the new temple. The community of disciples is what unites Mk. 11:22–25.

One proof of this is that Peter is acting as a representative of the disciples in this pericope. Note that while it is Peter who expresses "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered" (Mk. 11:21), Jesus directs his response to all (Mk. 11:22). Next, Jesus teaching the disciples to "have faith" and stressing the need for prayer should remind us of one other time Jesus emphasized faith and prayer—during the healing of the boy with a demon in Mk. 9:14–29. The themes here are also faith and belief ("Everything is possible to one who has faith" [Mk. 9:23]) and prayer ("This kind can only come out through prayer" [Mk. 9:29]). Liberation from demons, as seen earlier, is a sign of the inbreaking time of fulfillment. If the disciples want to be a part of this

[51]Kirk, "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25," 524.

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dynamic, they must have faith and pray. In the same way, if the disciples want to be part of the new temple, they must also have faith and pray.

This argument, however, will only be as strong as the link between the image of the temple and the community of disciples. Thus, it is important that we establish the withered fig tree as symbolic of the temple's end and "this" mountain (referring to the temple mount) being uprooted and thrown into the sea as representative of the temple's fate. The pericope about the withered fig tree ends with Jesus saying to the disciples, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." "Stand praying" and "forgive" should put the disciples opposite the temple. Does not the temple stand as a house of prayer? Is not the temple the place to offer sacrifice for atonement and forgiveness? The community of disciples are now the new locus of these activities. As long as they keep on praying and forgiving, they are the new temple.

That the disciples should be given such importance should not surprise us. Jesus' first act after his baptism, after he proclaims the summary of his message, "This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand …," is to call the first disciples. Mk. 1:14–8:30, in the outline of Mark proposed by many exegetes, is usually identified as the section where Jesus establishes the stage for his ministry. It is when he reveals in word and deed what his mission is all about. This section can be subdivided into three cycles (1:14–3:6; 3:7–6:6a; 6:6b–8:30) which follow a pattern of summary, a scene involving the disciples, mighty words and/or deeds, and rejection. The importance of the disciples in every cycle is already apparent, but it will be further stressed in Mk. 8:31–10:52, the second major section of Mark, also known as "the Way." This part can be read as Jesus forming the community gathered around him, molding them into a model of discipleship patterned after his passion, death, and resurrection (which he predicts three times here).

That Jesus seems to be creating something new with the disciples should also not surprise us because the theme of new creation has been present from the very beginning of Mark. Echoes of Genesis

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can be heard in Mark 1 with mentions of "beginning" (which is also one of the first words of Genesis), God's Spirit (which hovered over the waters before creation), and Jesus among wild beasts (a possible allusion to the garden).

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and his demonstration in the temple are acts of judgment. Judgment in the Old Testament is not just the promulgation of a decree or decision. It is better understood as an act of intervention and rectification.[52] On the present state of the temple, Israel, and the world, God, through Jesus, has pronounced his judgment. The old time has ended. God's intervention and rectification is to signal the new era borne now by the new temple, the community of disciples, and another figure.

Jesus is also the New Temple

The new house of prayer for all peoples is also Jesus. A clue that leads us to this assertion is in how Jesus concludes the parable of the tenants. It is quite clear that Jesus is the son of the vineyard owner whom the tenants seize and kill. But Jesus suddenly switches metaphors at the end of the parable. He shifts from agricultural to temple imagery: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." Ironically, this passage comes also from Ps. 118 (see vv. 22–23), which the crowds used to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem.

Another clue is "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands" in Mk. 14:58. This is easily applied to Jesus and his resurrection. But why is this presented in Mark's account of Jesus' trial in front of the Sanhedrin as false testimony about which the lying witnesses cannot agree (Mk. 14:57, 59)? Perhaps what is false about it is that Jesus is not the one who will destroy the temple but God, and it is God who will vindicate the New Temple by raising him up on the third day. Or

[52]Richard J. Clifford, "The Prophets," class lecture, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Boston, MA: April 2, 2013).

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maybe this is an example of Markan irony. While the false witnesses' intent is to lie about Jesus, resulting in inconsistent testimonies, they actually end up saying the truth.

Still another clue that Jesus is the New Temple lies in the close parallelism between the preparation for the entry into Jerusalem and the preparation for the Passover. In both sequences, two disciples are sent ahead, and they find someone who can help them with what Jesus needs. Gray summarizes the strong verbal resonances between Mk. 11:1–11 and Mk. 14:12–17 in the chart[53] reproduced below:

	Mark 11		Mark 14
vv. 1c–2a	ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς	v. 13a	ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς
v. 2a	ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν κώμην	v. 13a	ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν πόλιν
v. 3b	εἴπατε· ὁ κύριος	v. 14b	εἴπατε τῷ οἰκοδεσπότῃ ὅτι ὁ διδάσκαλος
v. 4a	καὶ εὗρον	v. 16b	καὶ εὗρον
v. 11b	ὀψίας ἤδη οὔσης τῆς ὥρας, ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα	v. 17	Καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα

Mark 11 and Mark 14 signal the beginnings of the two narrative halves of Mk. 11–15. Mk. 11–12 is about the temple: Jesus enters it, judges it, and teaches in it. Mk. 14–15 is centered on Jesus: he offers his disciples his body and blood, he is arrested and tried, he offers his body and blood on the cross. In between these two halves is Mark 13, which speaks about the end of the temple and even the end of the world. Looking at these three parts together, we have a good summary of the flow of Mk. 11–15: the time of the temple—and everything it stands for—has come to an end. Jesus establishes a new beginning.

[53]See Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 8.

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Two scenes in the three-part structure above strengthen the image of Jesus as the New Temple.[54] The first part (Mk. 11–12) ends with the image of the poor widow giving "everything she had, all she had to live on," to the temple (Mk. 12:41–44). Early in Mk. 14–15 is a parallel image: a woman pours costly genuine spikenard on Jesus' head. She breaks the alabaster jar the perfumed oil is in; all of the oil, with nothing left or saved, is used to anoint Jesus (Mk. 14:3–9). Just as the poor widow gave all she had to the temple, this woman now gives all her oil[55] to Jesus, the New Temple. This anticipates, as Jesus points out (Mk. 14:8), his own giving of everything he has.

The Temple Curtain

The subject of this study is the temple controversy, but this writer does not want to imply in any way that it is the climax of Mark's Gospel. Counting the report of the resurrection in Mark 16 as more of an epilogue, as many other exegetes do, the climax must then be when Jesus dies on the cross (Mk. 15:33–41). At this particular scene, the temple (now referred to as ναός) is again mentioned: "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mk. 15:38).

Jesus' temple demonstration was a prophetic act symbolizing the end of the temple, its time, and everything it symbolized. It was a dramatic event that happened in the outer courts as seen by the use of the word ἱερόν in Mk. 11:15 and 16. At Jesus' even more dramatic death, the climax of Mark's Gospel and the most definitive sign of God's eschatological action, we are directed to the inner sanctuary (ναός) of the temple, its very core. We take the temple curtain that Mark refers to here to be the inner veil that served as the barrier to the holy of holies and not just the outer veil that served as the entrance

[54]This writer is indebted to Timothy Gray for the insight presented here. See Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 8–9.

[55]The oil was supposed to have cost more than three hundred days' wages (Mk. 14:5). Unless the woman was very wealthy, it can also be said that she gave not just the oil but "everything she had," just like the poor widow, to Jesus.

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to the sanctuary.[56] When the veil is torn, the temple is symbolically destroyed. At Jesus' death, the veil is rent in two. Jesus now becomes the figurative destroyer of the temple. He is vindicated from the mocking he received on the cross (Mk. 15:29–30): "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" But the final vindication will come when the New Temple "not made with hands" is raised up again in three days.

The torn veil was adorned with stars and constellation—a symbol of the heavens. The temple, in Jewish belief, is the center of the universe.[57] Its destruction is a sign of cosmic upheaval, a symbol of the eschatological inbreaking of the new καιρὸς. When Jesus was baptized by John, the heavens were also reported by Mark to have been torn.[58] The same verb, σχίζω, is also used for the tearing of the veil. Moreover, in both reports of tearing, the divine passive is used. God has definitively acted to shred the old era and to begin the new.

A Pastoral Note

We have focused on καιρὸς and time in talking about eschatology. Today, this image has strong advantages over using the "overused" metaphor of the kingdom of God. Though kingdom or βασιλεία is supposed to be a dynamic concept, our present political systems have rendered it antiquated. Kings and queens are relics of the past. What may be better able to communicate today is the image of time. We speak of "Generation X," "Generation Why," the "Millennials," and so on. To these groups, we can proclaim a Jesus who has established a new and everlasting generation, a time that will last forever.

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[56]See Gray's reasons for positing this (*The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role*, 188–189). The importance of Jesus' death would also symbolically warrant the choice for the more important veil.

[57]Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," 359–360.

[58]It should be noted that the same verb, σχίζω, is used for the two tearings.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Francis D. Alvarez, S.J., finished his STL at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry and worked under the direction of the late Fr. Daniel Harrington, S.J. Fr. Francis is currently pursuing a PhD in Theology and Education at the same institution. He is interested in studying how Scripture can be used more effectively in religious education. He writes a Sunday column—God's Word Today—in the *Philippine Star.*

Ramon L. Bautista, S.J., earned his Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and a PhD in Spirituality from Heythrop College, University of London. He was Spiritual Director at San Jose Seminary, Quezon City and at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, Cagayan de Oro for a number of years. He was also Novice Master of the Philippine Jesuit Province for twelve years, and is now Assistant Tertian Director of the Asia Pacific Jesuit Assistancy. Among his published works are *Hearts Burning: The Consciousness Examen as an Authentic Ignatian Formation in Discerning Love* (Makati: Bookmark, 1990); *Ignatian Prayer and Ignatian Discernment: A Critical Evaluation of Recent Literature in English on Two Key Aspects of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola as a School of Love* (London: Heythrop College, 1997); *A Way to the Desert: 101 Questions and Answers on Retreat, Prayer and Discernment: The Ignatian Way* (Makati: St. Paul's Publication, 2001); *Wood for the Fire* (Makati: St. Paul's Publication, 2006); and *Schooled by the Spirit: A Prayer Companion to Ignatian Spirituality* (Quezon City: Jesuit Communications, 2009).

Sr. Ma. Anicia B. Co, R.V.M., is a member of the Congregation of the Religious of the Virgin Mary. She completed AB Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila and MA Theological Studies at Maryhill School of Theology, Quezon City. After earning her STL, STD, and PhD degrees from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, she returned to Manila and taught Scriptures from 1991 to 2001 in different schools of theology and

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institutes of formation. Elected as a member of the General Council of her Congregation in 2001, she served from 2006 to 2011 as General Consultor and concurrently as chair of the RVM Education Ministry, President of the RVM EAP, and President of St. Mary's College, Quezon City. She is now teaching Scriptures at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies, Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia, St. Vincent School of Theology, St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, and Loyola School of Theology. She gives seminars and talks on the Bible, spirituality, women, and Mariology. She has written some articles, published a book entitled *Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo (1663–1748): A Lamp to our Path* (RVM: MICS, 1998), and translated Pope John Paul II's *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* into Filipino (*Pagtawid sa Bungad ng Pag-asa* [Paulines, 1994]).

Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., obtained his doctorate in theology from Queen's University, Belfast. Through his contact with students at the University College, Dublin, where he taught English and American literature for twenty years, he became interested in the main issues of faith and unbelief, culture and spirituality. He published his first book, *Help my Unbelief* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988). Moving to Rome, he became a professor of fundamental theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, where he served as dean of the theology faculty from 2005 to 2008. His courses were on the topics of unbelief and culture, the relationship between theology and imagination, the history of thinking on the act of faith, Newman, and Bernard Lonergan. He also worked on the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers and the Pontifical Council for Culture. Among his published works are: *What Are They Saying about Unbelief?* (1995); *The Human Poetry of Faith* (2003); *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (2004); and *Faith Maps: Ten Religious Explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger* (2010). Since September 2009, he has served as Rector of the Collegio Bellarmino, a Jesuit community of post-graduate students in Rome.

Sr. Helen R. Graham, M.M., was born in 1937 in Brooklyn, New York and entered the Maryknoll Sisters in 1956. She was assigned

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to the Philippines in 1967 and worked first in Datu Piang, Cotabato, before joining the faculties of the Sisters Formation Institute (now Institute of Formation and Religious Studies [IFRS]) and Maryknoll (now Miriam) College in 1968. She continues to be a member of the IFRS faculty. She received a Master of Arts in Theology from the Ateneo de Manila University (1971), a Masters in Sacred Theology from the Jesuit School at Berkeley, CA (1983), and a PhD in Theology from the Ateneo de Manila (1995). She has been a member of the Catholic Biblical Association of the Philippines (CBAP) since its inception in 1999 to the present and was a member of the Board of Trustees of the CBAP (2003–2009; 2010–2011). She is the author of *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Essays in Lukan Theology* (1978); *You Shall Be Handed Over: The Persecution Prediction in Mark 13:9–13* (1987); *"Sing O Barren One …" and other Essays on Biblical Themes* (2007); and more than fifty articles. She also edited, with Breda Noonan, S.S.C., *How Long: Prison Reflections of Karl Gaspar* (1985).

Carmen Valdés, PhD, is adjunct professor of Theology at Loyola School of Theology and Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines. She obtained a Master's Degree in Educational Management from De La Salle University Manila, a Master's Degree in Theology from University of San Francisco, and a Doctorate in Philosophy from GTU/UC Berkeley, California. She held a professorial chair at LST and was one of the first two recipients of the *International Marie Eugenie Award* at the Sala Nervi in the Vatican, Rome. Her areas of expertise are in spirituality, education, and the facilitation of leadership training programs. Her professional experience ranges from being a vice president of human resources at Steelcase/Metro, HR director at *The Gap* in San Francisco, director at Ayala Corporation in Manila, and Marketing Director at the Cultural Center of the Philippines to former Dean of Assumption College Marie Eugenie School of Innovative Learning and Creative Director of METTA. She has been on the lecture circuit for leadership development in Southeast Asia, California, and the Philippines. Her forté is in the field of spirituality, life coaching of adults and teenagers, and executive coaching for corporate professionals. She has published three music CDs of her

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personal compositions and has an unpublished recording called the TEMPO Series for movement and dance.

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