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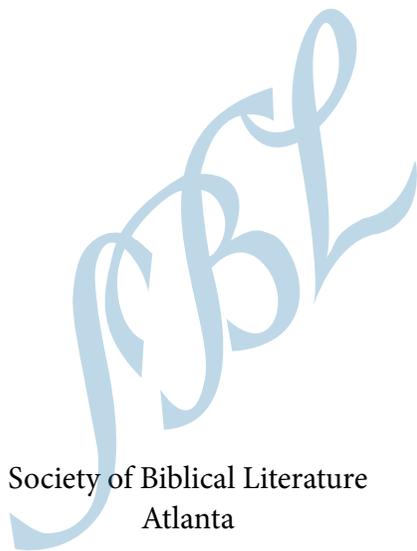
DISCOURSES OF EMPIRE

The Gospel of Mark from a Postcolonial Perspective

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THE GOSPEL OF MARK FROM A  
POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Hans Leander



Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta

DISCOURSES OF EMPIRE  
The Gospel of Mark from a Postcolonial Perspective

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## PREFACE

As I began work on this study in the fall of 2005, the global phenomenon known as the return of religion had fueled a debate regarding the relation between religion and politics. Although scholars today more often refer to a *new visibility* rather than a *return* of religion, the debate is ongoing.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the threatening rise of religious fundamentalism, religion also permeates contemporary Continental philosophy, the arts, and the media, as well as the rhetoric of international politics. For better or worse, this new visibility of religion has increasingly challenged two central tenets of the West: first, the assumption that modernization entails secularization and the disappearance of religion; and second, that religion and politics should be kept in strictly separate spheres. Hence several contemporary scholars describe the present condition as *postsecular* (Sigurdson 2009; Boeve 2008).

Here in Sweden the debate also concerns the role of our national church, whose relation with the state has been redefined by a January 2000 law.<sup>2</sup> In the Swedish media the debate concerns (among other things) whether the church ought to be involved in “politics.” As indicated by an editorial headline in Gothenburg’s largest morning paper (Göteborgsposten 2004), “Don’t Pursue Politics in the Name of the Church,” the rhetoric typically centers upon modernity’s division between politics

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1. Since *return* implies a simple reemergence of something that has been in decline, scholars today more often refer to a *new visibility* of religion (Hoelzl and Ward 2008).

2. Gaining legal force on January 1, 2000, this law basically declared the Church of Sweden to be a faith community among other faith communities (i.e., free churches, Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, etc.), all of which were given equal opportunities to register with the state in order to have their dues collected from their members by the state along with the income tax. It should also be acknowledged, however, that the law reserved a particular role for the Church of Sweden as compared to other religious communities, not least in terms of funeral services.

and religion, which defines religious faith as a private matter and political commitments as not genuinely rooted in Christian faith, and hence secondary to the church's true vocation. Similar sentiments have been found among Swedes in recent surveys about religious congregations and socio-political engagement (Lundqvist 2011).

To some extent, the questions posed in this book about Mark's Gospel address these debates. Even if modernity's definition of religion is in some sense legitimate, it can be asked whether a division of human reality into religious and political spheres, or "kingdoms" as Luther would have it, prevents us from hearing Mark's Gospel as its primary premodern audience heard it. For instance, Mark's stunning use of ὁ σταυρός (the cross) as a concept metaphor can hardly be heard with this division intact. In order not to be bereaved of significant dimensions of the gospel message, then, the argument here moves beyond the hotly debated division between religion and politics and conceptualizes the religio-political setting in which Mark was initially circulated: the ancient imperial culture of Rome. And although one might consider such a move to be fraught with difficulties and dangers, it is nevertheless a crucial journey on which to embark in a postsecular condition.

But why "postcolonial"? As will be seen, postcolonial criticism has often implied a secularist stance. Applying a postcolonial perspective on a biblical text is thus a way to challenge the secularism of postcolonial thinking, thereby connecting it with the postsecular. Postcolonial criticism, as understood here, has much in common with the more recent postsecular trajectory, not least by being critical of certain aspects of modernity and the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, since Sweden can hardly qualify as a nation with a colonial history of its own, one might ask why a Swede would find postcolonial criticism a helpful perspective for biblical interpretation. Despite major attempts to become an empire during the seventeenth century, *empire* remains somewhat foreign as a concept in Swedish. Unlike in the English-speaking world, where *empire* is used quite extensively, the Swedish term *imperium* tends to be avoided. The exception would be the movie *Star Wars*, which, of course, tends to give the concept a fictive character. Not even the Romans had an empire, if Swedish would be the norm, the Swedish term being *Romarriket*.

The postcolonial perspective used here, however, implies that empire—for better or for worse—has affected the present condition in far more ways than we would perhaps like to admit. This includes Swedish society and its contemporary mixture of cultures and religions. It is there-

fore an important topic, an exciting one at that, in order to understand and engage with the present. As argued by the Swedish postcolonial biblical scholar Anna Runesson (2006, 123–24), since the term *global village* tends to hide the power relations that stem from European colonialism, *postcolonial* is a better term to describe our present circumstance—even in Sweden.

Hence, even if Sweden's résumé as an actual colonizer is comparably short—the Sami people need to be mentioned here<sup>3</sup>—this study emphasizes the extent to which the Swedish society has been intertwined with European colonial history by promoting colonial expansion, being culturally defined by it, gaining from it economically, as well as helping to resist it. As an indication of this complex historical affiliation, there are rave debates over how to deal with racist and colonial stereotypes in Swedish popular culture. Most recently, when a children's book had been criticized for reproducing a racial stereotype known as the pickaninny, the author decided to withdraw the book.<sup>4</sup>

The complex ways in which Swedes have interacted with European colonialism can also be seen in Protestant mission. Reporting from a missionary meeting in London, a Swedish missionary magazine proposed that “the Englishmen are, with all their mistakes, of all nations on earth, the one that has the power and means that are required to prepare the way for Christianity and ... protect its tender sprout among the heathens” (Tottie 1884, 118). The attitude was ambivalent; Protestant mission from Sweden supported as well as resisted the colonial expansion.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the missionary magazines that grew in numbers during the latter part of the nineteenth century engaged a large number of Swedes in the project often referred to as “the white man's burden.”

Also, as represented by such writers as Henning Mankell and Per Wästberg, as well as the rise of solidarity movements during the anticolonial struggles of the 1960s, the issue of colonialism has a more recent history in Sweden. Economically, Sweden was a leading supporter of the liberation movements. In 1994 the African National Congress in South

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3. For a critical discussion on the Swedish treatment of the Sami people, see Claesson 2003.

4. Söderling 2012. The debate has been especially passionate during November and December 2012 in various media, i.e., the Internet, radio, and newspapers.

5. For a recent study of missionary magazines in relation to European colonialism, see Odén 2012.

Africa and South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in Namibia had received a total of 1.6 billion SEK (Swedish kronor), which is more than the combined contributions of the socialist countries in Europe (Palmborg 2009, 36). In line with this, Fairtrade has become prominent in Sweden, not least in the churches. Promoting what used to be called "colonial products" (i.e., coffee, tea, and chocolate), albeit produced under decent working conditions, Fairtrade makes visible how a colonial heritage continues to play a role in the Swedish society.

In addition, I have personal reasons for my interest in the postcolonial research field. My grandfather worked for the Svenska tändsticks AB (now Swedish Match), and his employment in British India as a sales manager during the 1930s had a considerable influence on his self-understanding. In relation to a colonial history that also runs in the family, so to speak, I have been intrigued by postcolonial criticism, especially by its focus on the subjectification that is made possible through stereotypical discourse.

Further, the postcolonial perspective is connected to my specific social location in Hammarkullen, a suburb north of Gothenburg where 82 percent of the population is of foreign background.<sup>6</sup> The location's affinity with what Stuart Hall (1996, 242) describes as "the notion of post-colonial times" can be illustrated by the following anecdote. Before the initiation of the Second Gulf War in March 2003, I had participated in several large peace marches in central Gothenburg.<sup>7</sup> Returning home after one such march, I encountered some Iraqi neighbors who had recently escaped Saddam's brutal regime. Having ascertained the event from which I was returning, they engaged me in a lengthy discussion. I attempted to argue that democracy cannot be imposed by foreign military intervention, and they vigorously attempted to dissuade me from what they regarded as my "misguided" conduct. Eventually, since neither the attempt to stop the war nor the war itself was successful, a friendship developed between us that was beautifully represented when, during the celebration of my fortieth birthday, one of my friends, a musician, sang a mixture of Iraqi-Swedish songs accompanied by a lute.

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6. See Göteborgs stads stadsledningskontor 2010. *Foreign background* is defined as born abroad or with both parents born abroad. Compared to 29 percent in Gothenburg as a whole, Hammarkullen clearly sticks out.

7. Hall (1996, 244) describes the First Gulf War with its colonial history and ambiguous complexity as "a classic post-colonial event."

Beyond this, my background as a peace activist, with its experiences of empowerment and disillusionment, also attracts me to the issues of the (im)possible, of agency, and of being caught up in reproductions of binary divisions, all of which are prominent in postcolonial criticism. As such, the interest with which I approach Mark's Gospel is fraught with ambiguity and a keen awareness of the risks regarding what Gayatri Spivak (1988a, 290) has called "dangerous utopianism," and what my former teacher Lennart Thörn would refer to as "an over-realized eschatology." I take this awareness as representing what Hall (1996, 247) describes as the "serialized or staggered transition to the 'post-colonial,'" which implies a transition "from difference to *différance*"—from an identification against the other to an identification with the fragmented nature of self as well as other.



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## INTRODUCTION

What we make of the Bible is important politically because it affects what the Bible makes of us.

—Tat-siong Benny Liew (1999a, 21)

That such an ambiguous story as the Gospel of Mark is proclaimed as the “good news” of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1) has been a question for many biblical interpreters and theologians through the centuries. Considering that both Matthew and Luke probably intended their Gospels to replace Mark, it is not even clear how it survived as a Gospel.<sup>1</sup> As illustrated by Augustine’s (*Cons.* 1.2.4) well-known treatment of Mark as Matthew’s “attendant,” Mark became a neglected canonical Gospel for a long time—a circumstance that Brenda Schildgen (1999, 35–37) has tellingly designated: “present but absent.”

As the hypothesis of Markan priority became accepted during the nineteenth century, Mark left its shadowy existence and became considerably more attractive as a scholarly object. Although this new interest mainly regarded Mark as a window through which to study the historical Jesus, or with the twentieth-century development of source and form criticism to search for the fragments and oral sources behind the Gospels, the shift was still radical. In the 1950s moreover, with the rise of redaction criticism (Marxsen 1969), Mark also began to be appreciated as a theological composition in its own right. From here, the step was not far to narrative criticism, an approach that has drawn deeply on New Criticism in literary studies, resulting in readings of Mark as a unified narrative (Rhoads and

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1. Graham Stanton (1997, 341–42) argues that Matthew and Luke wrote to replace Mark. A common explanation for Mark’s survival is its connection to the apostle Peter, which will be discussed below. Joanna Dewey (2004) has also suggested that its popularity as an oral story during the first century is an important factor.

Michie 1982; Kelber 1979). Furthermore, since an ongoing development in the field of hermeneutics has been to relocate the meaning of texts from the author's intention to the reader, the ambiguity and unfinished character of Mark's Gospel has begun to appear more attractive to contemporary scholars. With its lack of a birth narrative, paratactic style, hectic pace, and enigmatic ending, Mark has become increasingly appreciated by readers who find fascinating what appears to be ambiguous, unfinished, and in the making. Again, Schildgen (1999, 21) puts it well: "Like the gospel's empty tomb, its ambiguities, paradoxes, and 'open-endedness' prove to be precisely what interests contemporary commentators." This interest constitutes one of the premises of the current project.

#### BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN TRANSITION

The way in which I conduct this study of Mark's Gospel also connects to a development in biblical scholarship that, for theoretical as well as empirical reasons, emphasizes the significance of the scholar's location, interest, and perspective. Whereas the theoretical development has mainly taken place in the fields of hermeneutics and poststructuralist theory, the empirical aspects concern an actual widening and decentering of the geopolitical location of biblical scholarship and its effects on biblical interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, a Chinese American biblical scholar who prominently represents this development, regards historical-critical research, with its claims of objectivity and impartiality, as being embedded in the episteme of nineteenth-century Europe and "decisively influenced by the colonial and empire-building impulses of Europe."<sup>3</sup> Since historical-critical research has dominated modern biblical studies, not least the Swedish context in which I received my scholarly training, Kwok's trenchant post-colonial critique intriguingly challenges our self-understanding as biblical scholars. In this study therefore I deal with this critique in a rather careful manner.

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2. For introductions to and overviews of hermeneutics and poststructuralist theory, and its implications for biblical interpretation, see Moore 1994; Aichele et al. 1995; Adam 2000; and Thiselton 1992; 2009.

3. Kwok 1998a, 80. As seen in the edited volumes of Sugirtharajah (1991; 2008) and Segovia and Tolbert (1995b; 1995a), this critique against what is seen as a historical-critical paradigm is widespread in the field of postcolonial biblical criticism.

In one sense, however, pointing out the contingent character of biblical research is battering at an open door. Already in 1906, Albert Schweitzer famously criticized nineteenth-century scholarship on the historical Jesus for imposing its own liberal and modern notions on the ancient sources.<sup>4</sup> Historical-critical scholars of today therefore generally accept the impossibility of pure objectivity. The consequence of such acceptance, on the other hand, is typically seen as being of limited importance. Of course, no one can be objective (one can admit with a shrug of the shoulders), but to be as objective as possible is nevertheless upheld as the desirable ideal. Rather than to increase the level of critical academic self-consciousness, Schweitzer's critique is then taken as a call to intensify what Daniel Patte has called an anticontextual approach and to fortify the ideals of objectivity.<sup>5</sup> To a limited extent, however, the postmodern and postcolonial take on historiography has given rise to metacritical discussions among scholars with a historical-critical orientation, about the epistemological presumptions as well as the political and ethical nature of biblical research (cf. Via 2002; J. Collins 2005). Also, the increasingly heterogeneous character of biblical scholarship from the 1970s onward has undermined the notion of a one and only scientific approach.<sup>6</sup> Thus Schweitzer's critique now seems ripe for the harvesting of its metacritical potentials.<sup>7</sup>

I here need to point out that the postcolonial critique of biblical research, as I understand it, is not a criticism of historical investigations per se. It seems pointless to deny that historical inquiries about a text's date, provenance, authorship, genre, primary audience, and so on, as well as careful analyses of the text itself, significantly contribute to discussions

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4. See Schweitzer 2000, which is based on the second German edition, originally published in 1913.

5. Daniel Patte (2011, 198–200) describes North Atlantic academia as denying its contextual character, hence as “anti-contextual.” As for my situation, since the scholarly context is divided, it is difficult to speak in the singular about a European, or even a Nordic, research environment. Whereas some uphold the anticontextual approach, others are more prone to regard biblical research as intertwined with political, cultural, and ecclesial discourses. Cf. Segovia 2000, 11, who critiques historical criticism for its low degree of critical self-consciousness, either of itself as a paradigm or of its relationship to other modes of interpretation.

6. This heterogeneity is particularly represented by the plurality of “criticisms” that have developed in biblical studies since the 1970s—narrative criticism, structural criticism, social scientific criticism, ideological criticism, deconstructive criticism, etc.

7. For a similar interpretation of Schweitzer, see Moxnes 2012.

about a text's meaning. The critique is rather to be seen as a questioning of the epistemological premises and truth claims of biblical exegesis. When a notion of a stable original meaning is upheld, along with the possibility of extracting that meaning via a scientific methodology, biblical scholarship produces notions of biblical authority that are problematic, to put it mildly. This problem was illustrated in 1951, when Swedish biblical scholars made a common public statement known as *Exegetdeklarationen* (the exegetical declaration) that addressed the disputed issue of female ministers in the Church of Sweden. The statement was concise:

The undersigned professors and assistant professors in New Testament exegesis at the nations' two universities hereby declare, based on careful research, as our firm opinion that the appointment of so-called female ministers in the church would be inconsistent with New Testament beliefs and would entail a departure from the fidelity to Holy Scriptures. Jesus' choice of apostles as well as Paul's words about the position of the woman in the congregation have a principal meaning and are independent of contingent conditions and opinions. The present proposition about granting women admission to ministry in the Church of Sweden must therefore be said to encounter serious exegetical obstacles.<sup>8</sup>

The New Testament texts, according to this declaration, have a fixed and timeless meaning that the academically trained exegete can extract and that the church is bound to follow in order to show scriptural fidelity. And while the Church of Sweden eventually granted women admission to the ministry in 1958, the exegetical declaration helped to form extant notions regarding biblical exegesis and authority that continue to fuel resistance against female ministers in a number of ecclesial circles. In other words, to claim scientific or exegetical objectivity when studying the meaning of a biblical text can be a highly political move. Indeed, the irony of the role played by these Swedish scholars is not to be missed. In the late eighteenth century, when modern biblical scholarship emerged, the claims of a strict, historical, scientific objectivity represented a critical and socially progressive position that paved the way for establishing an academic scholarship in partial opposition to church authority and dogma.<sup>9</sup> As I will argue in chapter 3, the rise of modern biblical scholar-

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8. My translation. The Swedish text is published in Sjöberg 1953, 29.

9. Since historical-critical research was not accepted in the Catholic Church until

ship was a complex and paradoxical development, far from ethically and politically disinterested.

As pointed out by John Barton (1990), despite a common critique of the exegesis/eisegesis dichotomy, the notion of a text's original and stable meaning still holds sway in wide segments of biblical scholarship. The task of the exegete, it seems, is to "draw out" the true original meaning of the biblical text.

For my purposes, it is interesting that scholars with traditional exegetical training are increasingly questioning this strict division between exegesis and eisegesis. An illuminating example is Birger Olsson, a professor emeritus known in Sweden for authoring two commentaries in the *Kommentar till Nya testamentet* series. In an interesting response to Annika Borg's (2004) feminist critique of his commentary on 1 Peter, Olsson (2006, 156–59) refers to a development in biblical studies where a particular time has its particular "type of interpretation" (*tolkningstyp*). The type of interpretation Borg criticizes him for *not* conducting (i.e., feminist critique), he argues, was inconceivable during the late 1970s, when he was working on his commentary. He concludes his response by discussing the division between critical/exegetical and creative/theological approaches to biblical texts. Although trained in the necessity of a strict division, he is now expressing skepticism toward the possibility, and even the desirability, of such a separation:

I am increasingly skeptical about completely leaving the one task to exegetes and the other to theologians. We both need to show our exegetical and theological premises. In the present situation I would like to see more theological discourses in the *Kommentar till Nya testamentet* as well as more interpretive alternatives. The reader needs to realize the lack of absolute interpretations. We must find ways to live with several simultaneous interpretations. (Olsson 2006, 159, my trans.)

Showing one's exegetical and theological premises, Olsson here implies, is not tantamount to the dutiful declaration of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, confessional belonging, geographical location, and so on, simply as a means of putting them aside as interfering elements when beginning with the "real" task of objective historical inquiry. Rather, he

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1965, the claims of objectivity in Catholic settings can thus appear more radical as compared to Protestant contexts.

seems to suggest that such premises ought to be allowed to openly interact with the historical-critical interpretation, thereby avoiding false claims of an absolute interpretation and highlighting how different presumptions, interests, and perspectives can lead to different interpretive alternatives.

Rather than regretting the impossibility of objectivity or disinterest, then, I situate this investigation in one of the ongoing transitions of biblical scholarship and employ a type of exegesis that, in addition to inquiries about the text's historical meaning, includes metacritical analyses of the relation between the discursive location of the interpreter and the interpretation itself—an exegesis that strives to be more reflective of its presuppositions.

### HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

I address two interrelated questions in this work. The first one, which is treated in part 3, is of primary character and can be phrased in a straightforward manner: What is the stance of Mark's Gospel vis-à-vis Rome's empire? Mark has more to say about Rome than the single, highly ambiguous episode about imperial tribute (Mark 12:13–17). Being composed and initially circulated during the heyday of Flavian Rome, with its story enacted in an unruly region on the eastern outskirts of Rome's empire—then known as Palestine or Judea—the Gospel of Mark has empire inscribed in its fibers.<sup>10</sup> Analyzing the manner in which these fibers are interwoven, reproduced, negotiated, modified, and subverted constitutes my primary task in this book.

If the question of Mark and Rome was posed to biblical scholars today, the answers would most likely show a significant variation, ranging from pro-Roman apology to anti-Roman opposition.<sup>11</sup> Not so long ago, however, scholars fairly widely agreed, typically based on the tribute episode, that there was no conflict between the demands of God and the demands

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10. How to designate the land in which the Gospel stories take place is a matter of debate. This study follows Pliny (*Nat.* 5.66–70), who seems to reflect the common linguistic usage at the time of Mark's writing. Pliny referred to the area as "Palestine" and "Judea" interchangeably, and regarded Galilee as part of Judea. See also Jacobson 1999. I will deal with the provenance and primary audience of Mark's Gospel in ch. 13.

11. These contrasting suggestions have been made by Roskam 2004 and R. Horsley 2001, respectively. See also the research overview in this chapter.

of Caesar, and that the relation therefore was quite harmonious and free of tensions.

How to understand such a scholarly shift brings us to the second question, which I deal with in part 2. My suspicion for the present study is that since the question about Mark and Rome is posed in a location that is also affected by empire, the answer will inevitably be related to that location. In other words, empire is not only part of the past but also part of the present.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Mark's Gospel not only belongs to ancient bygone days, but is also part of the present. In order to catch sight of these admittedly complex correlations of the past-present, the second question is directed toward a modern time period—the second half of the nineteenth century—generally referred to as the age of empire, when modern biblical scholarship had been firmly established as an academic field. The second question can thus be phrased: How were nineteenth-century scholarly interpretations of Mark related to European colonialism? In other words, the second question dealt with in part 2 studies the relation between Markan scholarship and its nineteenth-century social context.

Purporting these two questions to be interrelated, I allow them to interact with each other, especially in the last part of the book. For both questions, moreover, the issues of location and self-understanding are important. Being the earliest written story about Jesus, the way in which Mark relates to Rome's empire had a considerable formative effect on the first-century Jesus followers.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the way in which Mark's Gospel was interpreted in nineteenth-century Europe was related to how Europeans understood themselves at this time, located (as most of them were) in the center of empire. The two questions thus involve two parallel analyses of two different kinds of material—whereas the first reads Mark, the second reads Markan commentaries. In both cases, however, the material is approached from a postcolonial perspective and located in its respective imperial context. *Discourses of Empire*, the title of this book, thus refers to these two questions and the parallel analysis that I conduct of Mark in the empires of Rome and Europe, respectively.

An important motivation for the double analysis conducted here is the role played by the Bible in European colonialism. Being one of the

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12. Cf. Webster's (1996, 8) statement regarding scholarship on the Roman Empire: "the interpretation of Roman imperialism has always, and in very complex ways, involved analogy between past and present."

13. The significance of Mark as the first written Gospel will be discussed in ch. 13.

key source documents for European expansion from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, the Bible has been deeply enmeshed in the forming of European colonial identities. To simplify, the relation has been twofold: the Bible was one of the reasons for the expansion, and the expansion also gave the Bible a particular meaning. Even if European colonialism has now formally ended, postcolonial critics typically contend that its effects are still very much present, economically as well as culturally, in both the former colonies and the increasingly heterogeneous Western societies. One can argue that these effects also have implications for biblical interpretation. Indeed, when a European such as myself poses a question about a biblical text in relation to Rome's empire, it is difficult *not* to deal with the ways in which this biblical text interplayed with the European empires, especially during its most triumphant years. Being informed by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as well as its critics, in this investigation I set out from an initial suspicion that biblical scholarship and European colonialism were in some sense related, and that these interconnections constitute a heritage that contemporary biblical scholars need to acknowledge so as not to reproduce.

Designing the study in this parallel way, further, challenges the ideological criticism of Dube (2000, 125–55) and Liew (1999a), which tends to regard biblical texts as in themselves imperializing. This is exemplified by Dube's (2000, 129) suggestion of four criteria that are intended to establish whether a biblical text is imperializing. Since texts can hardly be said to have such fixed meanings, I remain unconvinced that the use of criteria could result in clear-cut answers. Taken as heuristic questions, however, the criteria can help to increase the sensitivity to issues of imperial domination. I propose, moreover, that similar questions could be directed to the *interpretations* of a biblical text—hence the dual analysis applied here.

The parallel approach is also connected to the discussion, mentioned above, about biblical scholarship as an academic discipline. The recent decades' development raises questions about how new approaches are related to the historical-critical paradigm that has been dominating biblical scholarship since the late eighteenth century. In part 1 of this book I therefore engage in these metacritical discussions and offer a suggestion of how to understand postcolonial biblical criticism in relation to the discipline's Enlightenment origins.

The parallel investigations in parts 2 and 3 focus on seven Markan episodes that I have selected so as to benefit the analysis in part 3. Reading Mark as a representation of an identity position for early Christ followers,

I probe in part 3 the various ways in which it related to Roman imperial discourse, the dominant social order of its time. This analysis helps to conceptualize how Mark's Gospel formed a collective identity at the time of its initial circulation among communities of Christ followers on the fringes of Roman imperial culture. Two considerations have guided the choice of the Markan passages. First, the passages have special relevance to the way in which Mark relates to Rome's imperial discourse. Second, the passages cover the three main narrative sections in Mark's Gospel—Galilee (1:14–8:21), on the way (8:22–10:52), and Jerusalem (11:1–16:8).<sup>14</sup> More particular reasons for the choice of each passage will be provided as the study proceeds. The passages are presented in table 1.

Table 1. The Markan Passages Included in This Study

1:1	The Incipit
5:1–20	The Gerasene Demoniac
7:24–30	The Syrophenician Woman
8:31–9:1	The Parousia
11:1–11	The Entry into Jerusalem
12:13–17	The Question of Tax
15:39	The Roman Centurion

I can now briefly describe the basic structure of the project. Like a triple jump in track and field, the work is constituted by three parts of increasing length. After this introduction, which frames the purpose, in part 1 I delineate postcolonial criticism and discourse theory as the project's theoretical and heuristic perspective. I also explore some metacritical intersections between postcolonial criticism and biblical studies. In part 2 I conduct a nine-chapter investigation of how scholarly interpretations of Mark were related to European colonialism. These chapters deal with the passages displayed in table 1. The aim here is to analyze the complex and subtle ways in which commentators on Mark's Gospel interplayed with European colonial identity formations. Besides being itself an interesting

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14. For the structure of Mark's narrative see ch. 17.

task, this investigation seeks to achieve a sharper postcolonial interpretive optic when approaching part 3. Corresponding to these nine chapters, part 3 then probes the primary issue: how Mark in its initial circulation relates to Rome's order. In this part, I read Mark as a collective representation that forms an identity in the outskirts of Roman imperial culture. Finally, in part 4 I conclude by locating the findings in the contemporary debates on religion and politics, the postsecular condition, and offer some parting reflections on the investigation as a whole.

#### DISCOURSE, POWER, AND THE SUBJECT

The postcolonial perspective, which I will delineate in chapter 2, belongs to, or is closely related to, a research field known as discourse theory or discourse analysis (Loomba 2005, 22–90). However, since these terms can have different meanings, there is a risk of confusion.<sup>15</sup> Here I employ *discourse* with the meaning that stems from Michel Foucault's use of it in his critique of the Marxist concept of ideology, and is closely related to his understanding of knowledge, power, and the subject (McHoul and Grace 1995). Foucault's critique has been developed in the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe (1987; 2001) and refined into a social scientific methodology that is outlined in textbooks such as the one by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, 1–59). Applying this methodology, I use *discourse* to denote a system of statements and social practices within which the world becomes known and subjects are formed.

According to Laclau (1990, 100), a discourse includes linguistic as well as extralinguistic aspects, which he explains by the following simplified example of building a brick wall. One of the workers asks his colleague to hand him a brick. As soon as he gets it, he secures it in its place. Whereas the first act (asking for the brick) is linguistic, the second act (securing it in its place) is extralinguistic. Despite their different characters, both acts are included in the building of the wall. The building of the wall is thus seen as a totality—a discourse—that includes linguistic as well as extralinguistic acts, both of which signify meaning and communicate a message as part of the discursive practice of building the wall.

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15. In NT studies, Stanley Porter and Jeffrey Reed (1999) present discourse analysis as a form of text linguistics, which implies a different approach than the one applied herein. Further, as is evident in Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, there are other variants of discourse analysis as well.

*Colonial discourse*, a term that figures prominently in postcolonial criticism, therefore denotes a totality that includes the material and social practices of ruling distant territories as well as the linguistic patterns of thought, attitudes, and values that make this rule appear natural and self-evident. The two sets of discourse analyses conducted in part 2 and part 3 will be introduced further in chapter 4 and chapter 13, respectively.

Discourse analysis, as used here, bears some resemblance to social-scientific approaches in biblical studies, perhaps most closely to the sociorhetorical criticism developed by Vernon Robbins (1996).<sup>16</sup> But whereas social scientific approaches (unlike Robbins's) usually regard the social context of a biblical text as an objective material reality that is possible to access, discourse analysis regards social history as being textually mediated.<sup>17</sup> This difference is seen in Bengt Holmberg's (1990, 2) introduction to sociological criticism in New Testament studies, when he points out "the serious methodological mistake of confusing phenomena with the descriptions of them." Even accepting that Holmberg has here made a significant argument against idealism, it is nonetheless important to note that discourse theory rests on the linguistic turn in poststructuralist philosophy and alleges the impossibility of having access to phenomena (or reality) apart from their discursive representations.

As do all approaches, discourse analysis has strengths and weaknesses. For example, if one were interested in ascertaining the number of Herod the Great's wives, this approach would not be the most suitable choice. On the other hand, if one were interested in the cultural, religious, and political meaning of Herod's marriages, a discourse-theoretical approach would be of great benefit.

#### INTERPELLATION AND REPRESENTATION

Given the significance of the conception of identity for this study, I will briefly delineate how discourse theory understands group identity. Beginning with the individual level, the subject in discourse theory is understood as formed by *interpellation*, a term that stems from Foucault's

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16. When working with a NT text, Robbins suggests analyzing different kinds of textures that include material as well as linguistic aspects, i.e., inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture.

17. I develop this further in ch. 3, under the heading "Decentering the Historical-critical Paradigm."

teacher, Louis Althusser. As a Marxist, Althusser (2001, 115–20) regarded interpellation in a negative light, as a function of ideology that conceals the true interest of the subject given by the economic conditions. In discourse theory, however, such economic determinism is not accepted, and hence the notion of an authentic subjectivity that is hidden by ideology is rejected. Nonetheless, the subject is still seen as formed by interpellation. By regarding the interpellation as being conducted by *discourse* rather than *ideology*, however, this approach indicates that the subject is continuously formed in cultural processes of identification. Rather than seeing the subject as a preexistent autonomous user of language, then, discourse theory sees it as formed by processes of identification with subject positions given via language and culture.

A particular discourse offers certain positions that interpellate subjects. For instance, in a classroom the positions “teacher” and “student” are specified and attached with certain expectations about how to act, what to say, and what not to say. Further, since discourse theory generally purports the existence of several discourses that compete to structure social reality, different interpellations occur simultaneously, establishing a fragmented subject. In one sense, these interpellations can coexist—for example, the positions *Christian*, *basketball player*, and *father* usually do not interfere with one another. On the other hand, there are often competing discourses that give contradictory meanings to a particular position, in which case the subject becomes overdetermined. In discourse theory, overdetermination is the default situation in social reality. Should a subject position appear to be free of conflicts, it is seen as being the result of hegemonic processes that exclude other possible articulations, making a particular discourse to appear natural and objectively true.

When it comes to collective identity, moreover, a similar understanding is applied (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 43–47). Rather than seeing a group (e.g., all Swedes) as bearing a particular character or essence that could be represented in a more or less accurate way, discourse theory regards group formation as the result of discursive closures that exclude certain characteristics while upholding others. According to Laclau (1993, 289–92), representation has a constituting effect on the group. Group identities are therefore not seen as existing a priori but rather as being formed in discourse by processes of collective identification with particular positions. Since groups are formed in discourse, a crucial aspect of group formation is representation; the speaking or writing about, or on behalf of, a group thus has a formative effect on the group.

Of course, a representation does not always function in a constitutive way: a group may not identify itself with a particular representation, or, in other words, become interpellated. Since the purpose of this work is to analyze Mark's Gospel as a collective representation, this circumstance becomes especially significant. Given that it was the first written Gospel, and that both Matthew and Luke seem to have used it as their main source, we can assume that it did function as a representation, at least to some degree. This notwithstanding, the reception of the Gospel by its primary receivers remains unknown, and thus it will not be possible for me to analyze either the extent to which or the manner in which Mark actually managed to interpellate its audience. In view of this uncertainty, I limit the investigation in part 3 to analyzing the text's interpellative *force* and its *potential* as a collective representation—not its actual effect on the audience.

#### THE QUESTION OF ANACHRONISM

The analysis in part 3 of a premodern context from a postcolonial approach and by use of discourse theory might raise questions about anachronism. Considering the weight this study places on how the past tends to become caught up in the present, the issue is surely delicate.

As David Jobling has noted, the modes of production in ancient and modern societies differ considerably, and he is therefore critical of drawing direct parallels between ancient and modern empires: "Simple links between biblical and current situations, whether they leave the Bible looking good or bad, convey no lasting benefit" (in Broadbent et al. 1999, 117–19). Surely, we ought to acknowledge the differences. Whereas European imperialism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was fueled by a capitalist economy, the Roman Empire was based on an agrarian economy. Rome did not exploit natural resources for economic gain, nor did Romans have access to gunpowder. However, in a discourse-theoretical approach, the mode of production is given less weight than it is in a traditional Marxist analysis. Also, as I will argue more carefully in part 3, both Roman imperial power and European colonialism can be similarly seen as a totality of combined economic, military, and cultural elements. Although their technologies and economies may have been different, both the ancient and the modern empires were upheld by cultural notions that construed relations of domination and subordination. Their different modes of production need to be recognized; but this

differential itself does not seem to preclude a postcolonial analysis of an ancient empire.

Fernando Segovia (2005, 71–74) thus points out the lack of a comparative analysis of empires in different times and places, and describes this as a “lacuna” in postcolonial studies that he finds “at once frustrating and challenging.” Segovia helpfully describes empires as long-standing and widespread phenomena, with enough similarities to be compared over different historical periods and cultural contexts. Ancient as well as modern empires, he contends, are grounded on two basic interrelated dynamics. First, there is a fundamental structure of center and periphery, where the center is symbolized by a city or metropolis and the peripheral societies are culturally subordinated to the center. Second, this basic structure is enforced by certain hierarchical dichotomies—Greek/barbarian, civilized/primitive, scientific/superstitious, developed/underdeveloped, Christian/heathen, and so on. Considering the magnitude of these sociocultural structures, one can expect artistic and literary production in the center as well as at the margins to be highly affected by them and are fruitfully studied in their light.

Another, more theoretical, objection to the analysis in part 3 might be that postcolonial analysis and discourse theory rely rather heavily on Foucault’s understanding of power, which, in turn, partly rests upon a distinction between modern and premodern societies. His argument was based on the transition in European societies, from the Middle Ages, characterized by *repressive* power, to the modern period, characterized by *productive* power. In the premodern society, according to Foucault, power was upheld by spectacular punishments that served to restore the honor of an offended ruler. In modern societies, on the other hand, discipline has been internalized such that the subject has more become its own guardian and only indirectly controlled by institutions such as prisons and mental hospitals. As ancient empires were premodern and rested primarily on repressive power, one can question whether Foucaultian discourse theory is applicable.

Interestingly, however, as Ania Loomba (2005, 49–50) points out, the same critique has been directed against the application of discourse theory to modern European colonialism. According to some critics, colonies were much more like medieval societies in their use of brute force to uphold their power. They were not modern in the European sense, and hence Foucault is far too Eurocentric to be used without adjustment in the study of modern colonialism. Then again, as Loomba (50–53) has

also shown, the colonial discourse analyses of these same critics to some extent bear the markings of Foucault's influence. Colonial power is then understood as both repressive and productive—as resting upon material and economical aspects as well as on cultural and linguistic ones. Furthermore, physical brutality is seen not only as repressive, but also as producing cultural notions and relations of power that far outweigh the power of the physical brutality itself. From this appropriation of Foucault among postcolonial critics, the step is not far for postcolonial critics to engage with ancient Rome.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the step has already been taken. In *Ritual and Power*, Simon Price (1984) offers a prominent example of a Foucault-inspired study of the Roman Empire. “The rule of Rome was represented in marble,” Price (3) states, pointing at the widespread imperial temples, statues, and communal celebrations that upheld the presence of the emperor in Asia Minor, even though he was physically absent. Surely, brute force also played an important role in terms of upholding Roman power; but the army could only manage so much. More important for understanding Roman power, Price (239–48) contends, are the social processes that created and defined the relation between subject and ruler. These social processes included political (administration, diplomacy, taxation, etc.) as well as cultural (rituals, statues, texts, etc.) aspects. Hence Price seems to be describing Roman imperial power as occurring in a totality of the cultural and the political. This totality, of course, can with Foucault be called a discourse.

Addressing the issue of anachronism, I think it is important to also acknowledge that all biblical interpretation involves anachronism. As I will further argue in chapter 3, the past is not accessible on its own terms. The mere act of translating a text written in a premodern society entails an anachronistic element. Therefore, although there are differences between ancient and modern empires, as long as one recognizes those differences, there does not seem to be anything that prevents a postcolonial analysis like the one conducted here. To the contrary, there is a lacuna, as Segovia said, at once frustrating and challenging, that needs to be filled.

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18. Cf. Moore-Gilbert 1997, 12, who argues that, like feminism, postcolonial criticism can be fruitfully applied to ancient as well as modern empires.

## MARK AND EMPIRE: AN ORIENTATION

As has become evident, this work contains two major analyses: (1) a reception-oriented, metacritical analysis of nineteenth-century interpretations of Mark in European colonialism; and (2) a reading of Mark in its ancient imperial setting. In what follows, I will give a brief overview of the two academic fields with which these two analyses interact.

## BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

The delimited question of how interpretations of Mark were related to nineteenth-century European colonialism has not received particular attention by biblical scholars. A case in point is the interesting work by Brenda Deen Schildgen (1999) on the reception of Mark from the second century until today. But even if Schildgen shows how the interpretations of Mark in history have been deeply affected by different social and cultural situations, she refrains from addressing the issue of European colonialism.

As for the somewhat wider issue of biblical interpretation in relation to modern European colonialism, there are three areas of research. The first area addresses the emergence of modern biblical scholarship and can be illustrated by Shawn Kelley (2002). Focusing especially on issues of race, Kelley contends that modern biblical scholarship, represented not least by the nineteenth-century Tübingen school, was deeply enmeshed in the construction of the orientals as the Europeans' racial Other. Also, the incisive article by Jonathan Hess (2000) locates the pioneering biblical scholar Johann David Michaelis in the eighteenth-century European anti-Jewish and colonial context.

A second area focuses on the nineteenth-century quest for the historical Jesus. In a brief analysis, Kwok Pui-lan (1998a, 75–81) argues that this quest was affiliated with colonial discourse, especially in its construction of the natives. In a more recent work, Halvor Moxnes (2011) has made this area significantly wider. In dialogue with Albert Schweitzer, Moxnes analyzes how writings on the historical Jesus helped form various kinds of national identities in nineteenth-century Europe. Although Moxnes's interest primarily involves nationalism, his work includes a considerable portion of colonial discourse analysis as well.

A third area concerns biblical commentaries. John Townsend (1986) has shown how the commentators' interpretations of Acts as depicting three planned missionary journeys by Paul—often uncritically accepted in

contemporary scholarship—was an eighteenth-century invention. Since premodern biblical interpreters had not found this missionary pattern in Acts, Townsend contends that it was related to the rise of modern missionary societies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Also, Ralph Broadbent (1998) has examined British New Testament commentaries as ideological writings. Analyzing commentaries from the late nineteenth century to the present, he concludes that the concerns of the rich and powerful have been given prominence and the concerns of the poor have been spiritualized or ignored (55). Finally, R. S. Sugirtharajah (1999b) has investigated the Indian Church Commentaries, produced during the imperial period in India. Noting that myths of race, nationality, and English superiority were integral to the commentarial interpretation, he argues that such myths were closely intertwined with the imperial cause.

As for the yet wider question concerning the complicity of academic (biblical as well as extrabiblical) scholarship on the attitudes and values underpinning the process of European expansion, a significantly greater amount of research has been performed, especially since Said's *Orientalism* (1979).<sup>19</sup> Of particular interest in this regard is a work by Suzanne Marchand (2009), *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*. Although Marchand shares Said's interest in the connections between orientalist scholarship and colonial politics, her approach also parts from Said by allowing a greater complexity in Europe's way of studying the Orient. When we examine the connections between Markan interpretation and European colonialism in part 2, both these works will be important to consider.

#### MARK IN ITS ANCIENT IMPERIAL SETTING

Several works on the question of Mark's stance vis-à-vis Rome have been written since the late 1960s. Although categorizing here constitutes a risky task, I have nevertheless divided them into four groups: (1) Mark as a Roman apology; (2) Mark as an anti-imperial Gospel; (3) Mark as an imperial Gospel; and (4) Mark as a combined reproduction of and resistance against imperial ideology. For reasons of space, this overview only

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19. For overviews of this research, see Moore-Gilbert 1997, 5–11; Loomba 2005, 42–62; Sardar 1999; and Macfie 2002. If the scope is further widened to include how colonialism has been related to knowledge and cultural production, the number of works dramatically increases. For overviews see Loomba 2005, 62–82; and Moore-Gilbert 1997, 5–11.

includes books, but several crucial articles and book sections written on this topic will be discussed as the project unfolds.

### Mark as a Roman Apology

Giving voice to the revolutionary romantics of the 1960s, S. G. F. Brandon (1967, xi) initiated his influential study of the historical Jesus and the Zealots by asking why “the Roman governor of Judaea decide to execute Jesus for sedition.” Similar to the iconoclastic work by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1778), Brandon held that the historical Jesus was a political revolutionary who took sides with his Jewish compatriots, supported their cause against the Roman rule of Judea, and endorsed their strategy of armed struggle. The Gospel of Mark, however, presented a different picture—and it is here that we begin to see the relevance of Brandon’s work for the present study. Mark’s Gospel, Brandon argued, was written in Rome in the aftermath of the Jewish War as an *Apologia ad Christianos Romanos*. As part of this strategy, Brandon continued, Mark dissociated Jesus from the Jewish nationalists, the Zealots, and presented him as being cooperative with the Roman government in Judea, and as being “studiously neutral to the political issues” (Brandon 1967, 220–21). Even though Brandon’s main focus was on the historical Jesus rather than on Mark’s Gospel, his reading is significant for placing the question of Rome’s empire on the agenda of Markan scholarship.<sup>20</sup>

Hendrika Roskam (2004) has made a similar suggestion. Taking Mark as being primarily written for Christ followers who were persecuted by both Jews and Romans, Roskam (238) contends that the political dimension of Jesus—his identity as Christ and as an executed rebel—is eliminated by Mark’s way of depicting Jesus’ ministry and death. In his Gospel, Roskam (238) notes, “Mark stresses that Jesus was not an anti-Roman rebel who intended to assume political power over an earthly Israel.” Roskam, however, diverges from Brandon in two important ways: first, she argues that Mark was written in Galilee; second, she does not share Brandon’s view of the historical Jesus as a political revolutionary.

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20. As shown by the responses to his work, Brandon’s claims were taken quite seriously. See Cullmann 1970; Hengel 1971; and Bammel and Moule 1984. For a more complete list, see Borg 1998, 25. Neill and Wright (1988, 388–90) regarded his work as one of the two initiators of the third quest for the historical Jesus.

## Mark as an Anti-imperial Gospel

As compared to the differences between Brandon and Roskam, the works in this group are considerably more diverse, making the task of demarcation all the more difficult.<sup>21</sup> The works included in this category are Belo (1981), Myers (1988), Waetjen (1989), and Horsley (2001).

In 1974, while living as a Portuguese exile in France, Fernando Belo's book *Lecture matérialiste de l'évangile de Marc* was published. Translated into English in 1981, his impressive work sets out to bridge the gap between liberation theology and biblical exegesis.<sup>22</sup> Combining a semiotic theory developed by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva with the structuralist Marxism of Althusser, Belo analyzes structural oppositions in Mark's text and points out how the powerless classes are set against the local and Roman elite. Like the Zealots, the Markan Jesus has an anti-Roman perspective; but unlike them, he is nonviolent and his strategy includes all peoples. Emphasizing what he calls a messianic practice, where the Markan Jesus moves out to the poor and outcasts and is concerned with the needs of humans, Belo represents a classic liberationist reading.

Combining sociological exegesis with insights from literary criticism, Ched Myers (1988, 31–33) applies what he calls a “socio-literary reading strategy” to Mark's Gospel. Inspired by and yet critical of Belo's materialist exegesis, Myers (36–37) demurs from the Marxist tradition in certain ways and is careful not to call his method materialist. Instead, he (42–45) makes use of a sociological model developed by John Elliott (1986) that, unlike the structural-functionalist school, affirms a conflict-based theory of sociology. Of similar importance to his reading strategy, moreover, is his use of Gandhian nonviolence as a hermeneutical key (Myers 1988, 47, 472). According to Myers's reading, Mark's Gospel was written around 69 c.e. for a particular community in Galilee that was in close proximity to the war. As such, Mark was addressed to a community that was facing pressure from Jewish insurgents to join the armed resistance and from Roman troops to willingly cooperate with their rule. In this pressured situation,

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21. The work by Hamerton-Kelly (1994) is a case in point. Focusing on the issue of violence through the lens of the thinking of René Girard, his work has some bearing on the purpose of this project. But since he refrains from discussing Mark's relation to imperial Rome, this work falls outside the scope of this overview.

22. Since Belo's work was somewhat demanding, due largely to his particular use of abbreviations, Clévenot (1985) rendered a shorter, more accessible interpretation.

Mark wrote a Gospel that was “alienative, confrontative, and non-aligned” (Myers 1988, 85–87).

Being published almost simultaneously and making use of a combined social scientific and literary approach, the work by Herman Waetjen (1989, x) is in some ways similar to that of Myers. The particular models chosen, however, are different. Waetjen (xiii–xiv) applies insights from the anthropology of Mircea Eliade, the sociological analysis of millenarian movements by Kenelm Burridge, and reader-response criticism as developed by Wolfgang Iser. The result is a Markan Jesus who represents a reordering of power under the eschatological rule of God.

Richard Horsley’s work on Mark benefits from his other works on the sociopolitical context of Jesus and Paul. Like Myers and Waetjen, Horsley (2001) combines narrative criticism with sociopolitical analysis. Purporting that Mark had been composed for existing Jewish village communities, Horsley reads the story as representing a renewal movement among a subjugated people. The Markan Jesus, Horsley thus suggests, spearheads a popular rural movement in the villages of Galilee in direct opposition to the rulers and ruling institutions of Judea and Jerusalem that represent the Roman Empire.

### Mark as an Imperial Gospel

Adam Winn (2008) is the only work of which I am aware that explicitly reads Mark as advancing the imperialism of God in clear-cut opposition to the imperialism of Rome. His stance thereby places him in a category that is quite distinct from the other readings. Even if Winn sees Mark as standing in opposition to the claims of the Roman emperor (a claim with which the second group would agree), he also regards Mark as in itself an imperial text.

Hence Winn’s reading is based on assumptions that differ from those of the works in the previous category. Whereas the readings in the second group are based on an identification with the plight of the dominated (albeit differently understood), and therefore driven by a critique of imperial domination, Winn (2008, 40) regards imperial power as benign and unproblematic (cf. Carter 2010). In response to Horsley, Winn states that “Mark is not anti-imperial, but he is advancing the imperialism of both God’s kingdom and the one who bears it, Jesus.” Since imperialism, as we saw above, entails the exercise of various combinations of economic, military, and religious control, Winn’s equating of it with God’s kingdom

is noteworthy and reflects unawareness of what Sugirtharajah (2006, 5) describes as the *receiving* end of imperialism. Consequently, imperial duplication is a nonissue in Winn's work, and one may then ask how God's imperial rule differs from the imperial rule that popular movements in the so-called third world have been struggling to free themselves from during the past century.

### Mark as Combined Reproduction of and Resistance against Imperial Discourse

Whereas the works discussed thus far have tended to read Mark's story in a more or less straightforward way, the scholars in this group, Tat-siong Benny Liew (1999a) and Simon Samuel (2007), find Mark to be more complex and contradictory.

Informed by poststructuralist theory, Liew (1999a, 64) examines how Mark constructs colonial subjects and finds both resistance to and reproduction of imperial discourse. Mark resists imperial discourse, Liew (149) argues, by depicting Jesus as being tragically murdered for his constant questioning of authority and for exposing the wickedness of the collaborative scheme of the Jewish and Roman leaders. At the same time, however, in depicting a second coming of Jesus in power, Mark produces a contradictory politics (149). By promising the utter destruction of both Jewish and Roman authorities upon Jesus' eschatological return, the Markan Parousia is "in the final analysis no different from [a] 'might-is-right' ideology" (107); rather, it "duplicates the authoritarian, exclusionary, and coercive politics of his colonizers" (149). Taken in itself, this contention places Liew in the third category (Mark as an imperial Gospel). But since he is careful to point out ways in which Mark also resists imperial discourse, his work has a higher complexity and belongs to the fourth category.

But is Liew complex enough? His provocative suggestion has been debated and will be further discussed in chapters 8 and 17. Its paradoxical character, however, is not to be missed. As is evident from the initial quote above, Liew evinces awareness that the Bible, rather than being a fixed entity, is a document that can be given different meanings—which, in turn, has political consequences. Given the complex nature of Mark's Parousia, why then would Liew make it a message of "might-is-right" in his final analysis?

The last work to be mentioned in this overview, Samuel's (2007) post-colonial reading, reads Mark as negotiating a space between Roman impe-

rial power and the relatively dominant Jewish nationalism. Inspired by Bhabha, Samuel (4–5) contends that Mark is neither procolonial nor anticolonial, but rather an ambivalent and hybrid discourse that affiliates and disrupts both internal and external colonial discourses. Unlike the present project, however, in which Mark is read as a collective representation that interpellates the Christ followers as a group, Samuel (4–5, 158) seems to regard Mark as the product of an already existing community.

Compared to the works that have been previously described, the postcolonial perspective applied by Samuel offers more nuances in terms of understanding how Mark relates to its imperial situation. However, Samuel's attempt to cover a wide range of texts and issues makes his work somewhat sweeping and cursory—hardly thirty pages are devoted to the analysis of Mark's Gospel story (1:12–16:8). As such, several motives and passages that would be significant to analyze from a postcolonial perspective are only hinted at, while others remain entirely unnoticed.

In summary, contemporary scholarship exhibits an exciting range of positions regarding the manner in which Mark relates to Roman imperial power. Considering the highly ambiguous character of the only passage in Mark (12:13–17) that explicitly deals with this issue, such an outcome should come as no surprise. Except for the last group, the mentioned readings tend to present Mark in a rather clear-cut fashion. In this sense, in this project I stand closer to Liew and Samuel in that I purport Mark to be more ambiguous and double-edged in relation to Rome.

One can also note that issues of gender are altogether absent in this admittedly limited overview.<sup>23</sup> Considering that gender is a prominent topic in postcolonial criticism (Loomba 2005, 128–45, 180–92) as well as a prominent motif in Roman imperial discourse (see ch. 13), this absence is dubious. In order to somewhat redress this deficiency, I here intend to press Mark's account of Jesus on this issue (see especially ch. 16).

Besides interacting with these works, in the present study I will also address the multidimensional way in which Mark interacts with empire. Not only does the initial circulation of Mark take place in an imperial setting, but Mark has also been read and used in various imperial settings ever since—not least in nineteenth-century Europe, which the analysis in part 2 will help to illuminate. Such a combination of analyses of Mark in

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23. One exception is Liew 1999a, 133–48, who argues that Mark reproduces Greco-Roman patriarchal discourse and suppresses female subjectivity.

different empires that is undertaken here has not been undertaken before. I hope that this wider grip on the trope of Mark and empire will enable us to formulate, in a postsecular and postcolonial world, how we might perceive Mark addressing empire today.

