A NEW BEGINNING: THE TIME OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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ABSTRACT

Narrative analysis of the New Testament, especially the Gospels, re-evaluates the use of time in the texts. The story told in the Gospels is not simply a chain of events randomly strung together, nor is it sufficient to understand the editor's intention. Rather it is necessary to regard the narrative as the basis of cooperation between narrator and reader. In this study, I want to explore the perspective of time in the Gospel of Mark. The tools of narrative analysis will be used at the service of theological interpretation. The Gospel of Mark unveils itself as a complex story with a beginning preceding time, and preparing a new, open beginning. While following the description of the deeds and sayings of Jesus, the reader is invited to arrive with him at a final Sabbath and to await resurrection and new life.

Key words: narrative analysis, time structure, fulfilment, new beginning

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One of the specific strategies of narrative texts is the way they handle time. It is the narrator who determines how the theoretically endless stream of events is segmented in his special communication. He is the one who highlights certain facts that he wants to tell, and he is the one who arranges these facts in a specific order. The order of facts and events is, of course, fixed, but the way the narrator deals with them is ultimately his decision.

In this regard, the way the Gospels handle time is apparently simple and clear. They are linear, straightforward narratives that rarely feature significant leaps forward or backward in time (prolepsis and analepsis respectively). Their plot mostly follows a single thread, and the protagonist is unmistakably Jesus of Nazareth. Compared to the modern narratives of novels and films, the storyline of the gospels is highly transparent. In a certain sense, their concentration on Jesus unites everything and everyone; the details of the plot gain meaning in him and through him.

This, however, may make us wonder: How does the special quality of time – in which Jesus is the protagonist who, based on the Gospels and New Testament accounts, can be considered the central figure of the whole history of the world – appear on the pages of the Gospels? What do the New Testament writings say about the time that characterises the world into which Jesus entered as the absolute messenger of God?[1]

Despite their essentially common message, each of the four Gospels goes its own way.[2] "World history", as political history, as the history of human society determined by facts and rulers, was mostly the preoccupation of the Evangelist Luke (cf. Luke 1:5; 2:1; 3:1). With his references to the rulers of the world, including Emperor Augustus, Luke illuminates Jesus' "alternative" approach to power. At the same time, these references undoubtedly create a specific history that the readers, familiar with the pagan world, can follow in time. The strategy Saint Mark differs from that of Luke, for example in that he mentions some of the worldly authorities, introduced separately in his narrative, only later, as if in passing. Thus Herod is mentioned in chapter 6, Pilate only in chapter 15, and the name of the chief priest in office at the time of Jesus is not mentioned at all.[3]

Time can also be understood in terms of the ritual world: rites and festivities mark special times and make time special. Feasts follow the cycles and rhythm of nature, or, as in the case of the Bible, they recall memorable events from the history of a community. New Testament writings do not only relate themselves to Jewish customs and feasts but also utilise and reinterpret them, facilitating a new understanding of their very history. The writers and narrators of the story of Jesus made use of these institutions, too, according to the needs and preconceptions of their addressees and their own beliefs: when constructing

the time of their narrations, they built not only on the relative events of the life of Jesus or on the "absolute" events and persons of history, but also on the feasts of Jewish life, such as Sabbath, Passover, etc.[4]

In this study, I would like to present the Gospel of Mark with a special focus on the use of narrative time and the theology of time.[5] I wish to explore the Gospel as a narrative, and to that end, I will take its text as a basis and interpret it in its entirety as the product of the narrator's work. This is not to deny the existence of prior sources, but my concept is based on the assumption that the narrator has created an independent work that reflects his own strategy and narrative intention.[6]

The "Beginning"

The inscription, or at least the introductory verse, of the entire Gospel of Mark is Mk 1:1, which starts with the word "beginning" (archē). "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."[7] The word "beginning" recalls the beginning of the book of Genesis, the origin of the world, and the whole Old Testament, though this echo is even stronger in the Gospel of John (Jn 1:1; en archē), since there we find the form "in the beginning", similarly to the book of Genesis. This beginning is not an act as in the book of Genesis (and, consequently, as in the first few verses of the Gospel of John, which refer to Genesis), but rather an opportunity for a full-fledged Christological confession to introduce the gospel.[8]

The actual role of this sentence, however, is questionable.[9] Is it worth declaring in the first line of a text that it is in fact the first line of the text? Furthermore, if taken as a mere incipit, the word "gospel" (euangelion), in this specific context, should be understood as a reference to the written work, and therefore as a genre, which is a relatively late phase in the development of the concept in relation to the New Testament. In this later use of words and in this sense, the emphasis is not so much on the Gospel being that of Jesus but on the fact that the writing at hand is the Gospel According to Mark.

There is a group of scholars seeking a third interpretation. They suggest that in this case, the word "gospel" should not be understood as meaning the written work, but rather the process that is beginning, being maintained and supported in the book and by the book, i.e. the spread of the Gospel of Jesus. The beginning of the good news is the story itself that the reader holds in his hands. First of all, one might say that it is the good news itself, not merely the text, that should continue. But we may also wonder whether, in this particular case, the word "beginning" has a more specific meaning. Does it not refer to the beginning of Jesus' story, which is also the origin of his good news? Accordingly, the be-

ginning can also have the sense of "origin". If this is the case, then we can look to Mk 1:1-13, interpreted as an introduction to the Gospel, for an indication of where the Gospel of Jesus "comes from", when and where it begins.

The first characteristic of time as it appears in the Gospel is that it stems from God's time (or, in part, even eternity) as revealed in the Old Testament. A significant number of interpreters believe that the narrator, with the introduction to the Gospel (Mk 1:1-13), and especially with the quotation from the Old Testament (cf. Mk 1:2-3), created a structure in which the story that begin son earth represents, continues, and fulfils the event that has already taken place "in heaven", and is recalled by the prophetic word.[10] The prophetic word, which the narrator presents as coming from Isaiah (in reality, it is a complex quotation of Mal 3:1; Ex 23:20, and Is 40:3), is actually the word of God. God addresses his messenger in heaven, who then appears on earth in the form of Jesus. In their "heavenly dialogue", God promises his messenger a forerunner.[11] In the introduction, the evangelist does not present the messenger first, but the forerunner. What the prophetic word described as a prehistoric and superhistorical dialogue is continued by the appearance of John the Baptist and Jesus in the wilderness. At the moment of baptism, then, the dialogue between the Father and the Son is realised on earth, on the banks of the Jordan (Mk 1:11). The beginning of Jesus, the origin of his person and all his actions are therefore to be found in the eternity of God.

One more aspect of the "beginning" should be mentioned. The original context of the quotation from Mal 3:1 refers to the prophet Elijah as the one who will return at the end of time to prepare God's way. The introduction of the Gospel presents John the Baptist as similar to Elijah. Only John the Baptist and the prophet Elijah are mentioned in the Scriptures as wearing a "leather belt" around their waists (Mk 1:6; cf. 2 Kings 1:8; see also Zechariah 13:4 on the other prophets). Elijah, whom the Lord took up to heaven from the banks of the Jordan (cf. 2 Kings 2:6-11), is to return and prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (Mal 3:1.23; cf. Mk 9:11-13). The beginning in the Gospel of Mark is therefore not only the fulfilment of God's will already revealed, but also the beginning of the end times and of the absolute future.

Empty and Fulfilled "Time"

The prophetic word revealed the origin of Jesus, which is also a programme to be carried out. Looking back to the eternity of God, one encounters the Eternal, ever-present and calling for a new future. Eternity can only be regarded as something in the past inasmuch as it has already made itself known in the history of salvation. Its revelation—as the heavens "are torn open" according to Mk 1:10, with the

verb schizein—opens up time, making earthly, finite time a sign of the eternal.[12] When he talks about the time of Jesus, the evangelist is not creating a document which is about some self-contained period. Rather, through the narration, he is revealing the presence of the eternal God realised and manifested in time.

The wilderness is the first scene of the story of the Gospel, and thus of the manifestation of God. After the prophetic word, the wilderness also refers back to the divine revelation that now has a history in this world. The wilderness is not only a physical place, it has a meaning. This is indicated by the first occasion when time is specified in the Gospel: the forty days during which Jesus fasted in the wilderness. The number forty primarily recalls Israel's wandering in the desert for forty years, but also Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19), and even the meeting between the Ninevites and Jonah, where the destruction of the city was expected after 40 days (Jonah 3:4).

Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness, then, continues the tradition of experiences of the divine, already realised in the history of Israel. In the wilderness, Israel experienced that it was indeed God who cared for them, and it was in this situation that they waited and prepared to enter the Promised Land. Elijah and the people of Nineveh also prepared to meet God and receive His mercy through one or another experience of the forty days. The wilderness thus symbolises the paradox of emptiness and fullness: the richness of the created world pointing to God seems to be destroyed or to disappear, but at precisely this moment, God himself steps closer to man. In a way, the wilderness represents the chaos before creation, as if to encourage man to face his own chaos and ask God to establish order. This is what happens as soon as the Lord overcomes temptation: the spiritual and also the physical beings of the created world worship Jesus (cf. Mk 1:13).

The withdrawal of Jesus into the wilderness takes place between the two "times" of fulfilment, corresponding to them and forming a pair with them.[13] The voice from heaven at the moment of baptism indicates a divine experience, a theophany similar to the one awaiting Jesus and the disciples at the moment of Transfiguration (9:2-9). The wilderness and temptation are soon replaced by the preaching of Jesus, however, and the Lord himself speaks of fulfilled time and the nearness of the kingdom of God (1:15).

With this programmatic exclamation on the part of Jesus, the narrator leads the readers from the wilderness that marks the beginning to the description of Jesus' public ministry. Through the work of Jesus, the kingdom of God is realised on earth, and the power of God, ultimately God himself, becomes present.[14] But how shall we interpret the concept of fulfilled time? Should we relate it primarily to the

promise of the past, or should we rather speak of the manifestation of the fullness of God?

The expression "fullness of time" or "times" is found in other texts of the New Testament as well. According to Simon Légasse,[15] the phrase pleroma tou kronou in Gal 4:4 means that the purely worldly interpretation of history has come to an end with Jesus' birth. Eph 1:10 uses the plural pleroma ton kairon, borrowed from the Pauline tradition, which probably corresponds to the vision of the time of the apocalypse, divided into periods. The word kairos occurs twice more in the Gospel of Mark. In Mk 12:2, at most an indirect allegorical meaning can be ascribed to the "time" of the harvest, but the focus of the parable is something altogether different. Mk 13:33, by contrast, once again promises a time of salvation: the time of the second coming of Christ the Redeemer.

After comparing these texts with the statement in Mk 1:15, we may rightfully ascribe theological meaning to fulfilled time in the full and literal sense of the word. This is related to what the whole gospel shows: in Jesus, God's present time enters the world, God's kingdom, that is, his reign, becomes available. Jesus is described as someone who expressly acts according to God's plan and will, and he does so throughout the narrative. He also defends the fact that he is truly the messenger of God who casts out demons by the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:22-29). He is the one who takes upon himself the fulfilment of all that "must" happen to him and in the lives of his disciples (cf. Mk 8:31; 13:7). He repeatedly refers to God's will as revealed in the Scriptures (Mk 14:21.27.49). The ministry of Jesus thus continues and fulfils God's eternal plan, unfolding in time what the living eternity of God means.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider in detail the question of what exactly the "nearness" of the kingdom of God entails. Some of the interpreters emphasise the—in a certain sense, dogmatic—fact that the eternal God "cannot give himself" partially. The great fulfilment in question is nothing other than God's final and complete commitment. This "dogmatic" approach thus takes on a moral dimension: now it is entirely the choice of the individual and of all humankind whether they accept God's rule into their lives and thereby allow it to be fully realised.[16]

It must be noted that the very fact that Jesus became a man, that he took upon himself the slow growth and development of human life, and that he also embraced some parts of the apocalyptic view that divides history into eras (e.g. in Mk 13), indicates that God's plan includes the history of time yet to happen and the further unfolding of salvation. Other interpreters stress the fact that although the eschaton has already begun, it has not yet been fulfilled. Some events must necessarily happen before the time of fulfilment (cf. Mk 9:1; 13:30; 14:25).[17] So long as God does not

suspend time, the kingdom of God is in a state of continuous growth and development.

Time Opened

The eternal God showed His will in the past through the prophets, and Jesus is the one to carry it out. But eternity, once revealed, is present in the world as a living beginning and freedom. In the narrative, Jesus not only does God's "everlasting" will, that is, he not only interprets the present in relation to a kind of eternally determined plan, but he is also the one who opens up an actual future for man, for those who believe in him.[18] Jesus calls mankind to faith—faith in God, by which man can experience the omnipotence of God, enabling him to break free from the bondage of earthly life and of the threatening reality of the present (cf. Mk 5:36; 10:46-52; 11:22-24).

Having experienced the power of God, we come to believe that the ultimate goal of all people living in time is to reach the eternal God. History has yet to catch up with God who is, as it were, waiting to fulfil it so that He may be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). According to Jesus' words, on the one hand, there will be a future for the brave and generous act of the woman of Bethany who used her precious oil to anoint Jesus (14:3-9). The gospel that began on the banks of the Jordan will spread around the world. The perspective will expand considerably to include the entire world not only in space, but also in time. The same perspective appears among the inevitable events of the end times (13:10). On the other hand, time will also come to an absolute end when the "Son of Man" returns "with the holy angels" (Mk 8:38). This is the moment of judgment that also awaits those who condemned Jesus (Mk 14:62).

Some kind of picture of the future and judgment also unfolds in the eschatological discourse of chapter 13. Although the chapter lists many events and arranges them in a kind of sequence (especially in verses 13:5-23), it is not intended to announce the events of the future, but rather to outline the expected and hoped-for fulfilment of history, including the fate of the disciples. Indeed, according to the climax of the chapter, i.e. 13:24-27, the coming of the Son of Man promises the gathering of the elect. History, then, has a positive final goal which is worth waiting and preparing for, even amid trials and tribulations. My observation that the narrator designates, and even opens up, a somewhat separate dimension of time for the reader, is even more apparent in this chapter. The suffering of believers, as described in chapter 13 (esp. in verses 9-13), threatens to discredit their hope for a positive outcome in history. By revealing the sayings and worldview of Jesus, the narrator preserves the image of an open, yet positive, and therefore hopeful future for his reader. He opens up the future, or rather, he speaks of Jesus in whom a new future is opened for man, in accordance with God's will and plan.

Jesus and Time

People of faith are open to their future and expect the time to come in a spirit of trust. The opposite of faith is fear, doubt, and unbelief, which Jesus repeatedly condemns in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 4:40; 5:36; 11:22ff.; 8:14-21). By acting as the fulfiller of God's plan revealed in the past, and as the implementer of God's will, Jesus acquires the authority to teach about the future. His actions and words make it clear to those around him and to the reader that he has a real relationship with the eternal, and therefore his words about the future are also trustworthy.

The narrator portrays Jesus as painting an increasingly clear picture of the near future in the second half of the Gospel, the unit beginning with 8:27. The middle part of the narrative (8:27–10:52) is characterised by the three predictions of Jesus' Passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). The detailed instructions on how to prepare for the entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper (11:1-3,4-7 and 14:12-16) echo one another, conveying to the disciples and the readers Jesus' sovereignty, his full awareness, and insightful understanding of the situation. Later, the prediction of the disciples' betrayal is also quite specific, especially the words concerning Peter's denial (cf. 14:30).

At the same time, Jesus does not know everything in advance precisely and in detail, or at least he gives no indication of such knowledge. One almost gets the impression that the passages just mentioned, where he presents the disciples with an accurate picture of the future, including the dialogue in 13:1-2, which predicts the destruction of the Temple, are not meant for the disciples to acquire certain knowledge of the future, but rather to create a kind of uncertainty about the time ahead. It is as if all these predictions mainly served the purpose of making the disciples leave behind their familiar vision of their own future and of the future of the world, characterised by the inviolability of their "Lord and Master", as well as by the imagined glory, or at least moral high ground, of their heroic loyalty to him (cf. Mk 10:38-39).

Jesus' "non-knowledge" is the most striking in relation to the end of time, the time of the return of the Son of Man, and, with it, the time of the final judgment. "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32). The Son's non-knowledge can only be understood in light of his trust in the Father. Just as all of his actions and his power are born out of his unconditional surrender to the Father's will, so every instance of his non-knowledge can be interpreted as momentary conformity to the Father's will. The revelation of specific future events seems to serve the purpose of making the disciples, together with Jesus, trust not in their own strength, but in the Father. Outlining the way of earthly suffering undoubtedly has ethical significance as well, since it renders the

striving for higher status in earthly life – a life which is otherwise inevitability grim – pointless. Jesus confronts the disciples in advance not only with his own expected failure, but also with theirs, opening up to them a future in which, despite all earthly expectations, they must trust in God's will.

Paradoxically, this is what the word spoken over the cup also says (Mk 14:25): "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." It is characterised by the certainty of Jesus (cf. Mk 14:18), the solemn knowledge that the Kingdom is about to be fulfilled, and at the same time the tormenting suspicion that the cup that Jesus must drink is also the cup of suffering (Mk 10:38-39; 14:36). Jesus' gesture is also a reminder of the final fast that he spoke of earlier in the Gospel: the time for fasting is when "the bridegroom is taken away" (cf. Mk 2:19-22). Jesus is prophetically foretelling his imminent death, but also the hope of the fulfilment of the Kingdom.[19]

There is a self-evident constancy with which Jesus goes from village to village, town to town, person to person, healing and teaching in the first part of the Gospel. He does not plan or reflect, but – perhaps with the exception of night prayers (Mk 1:35; 6:46) – he acts continuously, that is, he responds to the call of the moment and the Eternal in it. This constancy is only interrupted, or rather torn, in the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:32-42), when it becomes transparent in its essence. Jesus' three prayers are prayers for the Father's will to be done.[20] Jesus' death throes begin here. Death, which takes place on the cross in a physical sense, happens in the garden in the will of Jesus. What in Jesus' public life was manifested in trust and self-forgetful wholeheartedness towards the moment, now becomes a prolonged act, a frozen moment of crucifixion. What he overcomes is not doubt or unbelief, but the aversion of human nature to death. And all the while he believes in the fullness of time—in God's power to preserve his life, to give him new life.

Human Time

This possibility was revealed to the disciples in Jesus. They were called to follow him not only physically, but to enter the time in which one dies to himself but lives for God. The time they are given serves this purpose, as well as the purpose of inviting others to this view of time and of life. When Mark wrote his Gospel, he was responding to this invitation. He wanted to reveal the messenger of the eternal God who entered time, Jesus, and to convey his commitment to God and man.

Interpreters have long been of the opinion that the Gospel of Mark, almost imperceptibly, yet from the very beginning, consciously prepares its readers to contemplate the cross of Jesus. The reference to the arrest of the Bap-

tist (1:14), the mention of those conspiring to kill Jesus (3:6), and the belated account of the Baptist's fate (6:14-29) are all indirect indications that the reader—like the disciples—will probably understand only retrospectively.

The aforementioned three predictions, the conversation after the scene of Transfiguration (9:10-13), and the language of the cup (10:38-39) are more direct indications than the previous ones. As Jesus' actual suffering draws nearer, it is as if the narrator deliberately recalled past events with increasing frequency. He slows down his narration, metaphorically taking hold of the reader's hand to convey his important message to him slowly and clearly. The days of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem are relatively easy to reconstruct.[21] According to 16:1, the women found the empty tomb of Jesus on the first day of the week, that is, on Sunday. According to 15:42, Saturday was the day of rest in the tomb, and the Friday before that was the day of execution. Thursday afternoon and evening saw the preparation and eating of the Last Supper, as well as the arrest and first trial of Jesus (14:12-72). Wednesday was probably the time of the supper at Bethany and the betrayal of Judas (14:1-11). The events of Tuesday and Monday can also be clearly identified (11:12-19; 11:20–13:37). Hence, Jesus probably arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the week, Sunday (11:1-11).

The evangelist divides the last day of Holy Week into four three-hour time segments (early morning, morning, early afternoon, late afternoon). Jesus is crucified at 9 a.m., but before that – "in the morning" (15:1) – Pilate, the chief priests and the people have already convened. Between noon and 3 p.m., there is great darkness, and that is when Jesus dies. In chapter 15, Jesus speaks only once, before his death, with a painful cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then he issues a loud cry and dies.

The metronome is beating with increasing speed, time is indicated with increasing frequency, and violent acts are described in detail. These all are signs of the time of humans, the intensification of man's violent temper. It is similar to the experience of a train rushing towards us, rumbling ever louder and in a more menacing manner. Such an experience lingers on, taking time to fade into memory. Let us take note, it is the narrator who shares all this with his readers. He is the one who recognised in all this the sign of Jesus' faithfulness, that this is also a fulfilment of God's plan and of Jesus' predictions. The Evangelist, by repeatedly foreshadowing and accurately recording the hours of suffering, continues to remind his readers of the future both lying ahead of and opening up to them.

Beginning, Again

According to Martin Ebner, the scene of the women going to the tomb of Jesus and then entering the empty tomb (16:1-8) recalls the

introduction to the Gospel.[22] The location in the introduction, the wilderness, the place of emptiness and temptation, is aptly replaced by the tomb, which is obviously located outside the city and could be read as a symbol of the forces that have conspired against God. The messenger of God is John the Baptist in the introduction, and a young man in white in the conclusion, whom the other evangelists identify as an angel.

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus elicits a joyful response from the people. Faced with the empty tomb, however, the women are frightened and run away, saying "nothing to anyone" (16:8). The narrator falls silent[23] at the women's fear and silence, leaving open the question of the future of the gospel. Nevertheless, the reader knows that Jesus has already prophesied that the gospel will be preached until the end of the world (cf. Mk 14:9). Yet, due to the inaction of the characters in the narrative, the reader alone has the opportunity to bear witness to the gospel that he or she has just come to know. In this way, the reader himself or herself is to fulfil Jesus' prediction that there will be a "future" for his teaching.

The fact of the new beginning of time and the new time of humanity is more acceptable in the light of certain symbolic interpretations of the time structure of the Gospel. Benoît Standaert argues[24] that time specifications are usually more frequent at the beginning and the end of narratives, and this is also the case in the Gospel of Mark. According to Standaert, the continuity of the events of Jesus' last day corresponds to the description of Jesus' one day in chapter 1 (1:21-39), while the narration of the last week in Jerusalem exhibits strong ties to that of the week in Galilee (1:21-3:6). If the Gospel of Mark is viewed through this lens, then the temptation in the wilderness seems to foreshadow Jesus' final temptation, suffering and the darkness of the cross at the very beginning of the Gospel. But the heavenly words received at baptism, which are the declaration of the Father's love, make it clear that the God of the living (12:27) will not leave his beloved Son in death.

Ludger Schenke goes even further in his interpretation of the time specifications scattered throughout the Gospel.[25] In his opinion, it is easier to grasp the time structure of the Gospel if one follows the mentions of the Sabbaths (1:21; 2:23-28; 6:1-6; 15:42). Schenke believes that the reference to the Transfiguration "six days later" in 9:2 is a reference to another Sabbath, just as he sees the Sabbath before the Sunday of 11:1 in the narrative of 10:46-52. It is most difficult for him to ascertain the timeframe of 6:30–8:26, but the night of 6:48, the remark of "for three days" in 8:2, and the three trips to Gennesaret, Tyre and Sidon, and Decapolis all add up to a week again. Schenke thus counts a total of seven weeks in the Gospel, which, he believes, the evangelist has recounted for the sake of the eighth and

last week, of which only the beginning is narrated: this is the time of the women running away from the tomb, and the time of the disciples and readers who convert afterwards.

In what follows, I would like to use some of the ideas discussed above to complement Schenke's idea and to determine its theological significance. The gospel events that have taken place "from the beginning" and are now being fulfilled seem to reflect the events of the seventh day that marked the end of creation and made it perfect (Genesis 2:1-4). The Gospel of Mark thereby has a "sabbatical" dimension. I would like to clarify this complex statement from two aspects. First, the Gospel of Mark repeatedly considers Jesus to be the one who completes the work of creation. The closing image of the short narrative of the temptation (1:13: "he was with the wild beasts"), the statement that "the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (2:28), and later the statement in 7:37 that Jesus "has done everything well", which can also be understood as meaning that he restored the order, peace, and completeness of creation with his miracles of healing—all of these events and episodes from Jesus' life support the thesis that the narrator is aware of how the ministry of Jesus renews and completes creation.

It is hardly surprising that Mark's narration aligns the time of the disciples and of the Lord with the order of creation.[26] It can be observed in the parable of the growing seed (4:26-29), which, with the alternation of night and day, and the mention of seeds,[27] seems to recall the act and time of creation.

The Lord of the Sabbath has the right to reinterpret the Sabbath. But how does he give new meaning to the Sabbath and to time in general? To answer this question, we must reconsider the passion of Jesus, and, more specifically, the sabbath day of his resting in the tomb. Is that Sabbath not the day on which God recreates the life of Jesus? Is it not the day of mysterious silence covering the face of the deep, the silence into which the Word of God will begin to speak again? Is it not precisely this waiting and silence that the community of the faithful has to go through in order to be able to believe again, this time, in the Lord who lives? If the Gospel of Mark indeed covers seven weeks of Jesus' public ministry, then it is the last, seventh week that culminates in Jesus' gradual, eventually complete isolation, the final loneliness experienced on the cross. The fate of Jesus is a prophecy for his disciples and future believers. Those who had worked and been active in the world up until then had to suffer the absence of God in the seventh week, but only in this way could they come back to life.

These two aspects of the seven weeks and seven Sabbaths in the Gospel of Mark complement each other. The parallels with the story of creation evoke the beginning of the world and make ritual remembrance, that is, the shaping of the present by recalling God's past

deeds, possible. Renewal through death, communication through a deathly silence, the new word, and new life given to someone who slept on the cross, as well as the silence and darkness of the seventh Sabbath are the beginning of new life, first given to Israel in the Exodus, and now, and forever, to those who believe in Christ's redemptive death and resurrection.[28]

Conclusion

The ideas we have explored concerning the handling of time in the Gospel of Mark and its possible theological meaning presuppose a high level of combinative ability on the part of both the narrator and the reader. Ultimately, however, they are born of the loving concern with which today's readers, the evangelists, the disciples, countless generations of Christian men and women regard the gospel. They look at it with reverence, as the beginning of their lives, and as a written record born of a real encounter with Jesus. We look for meaning in each element of the narrative. The Gospel of Mark, too, serves as tangible proof that the eternal God does not shut himself away from our momentary existence, from the hours that sometimes drag on and sometimes fly by, and from the worries we experience day after day. In Jesus, after all, we see someone who got up at dawn to fulfil his mission (1:35.38), and who retired in the evening to pray (6:46). We mourn him on whom the darkness of the night fell on the day of his death (15:33), and we rejoice, for "the pride of the ancient foe is vanquished" by him (cf. the Roman Missal, Preface II. of the Passion of the Lord), and because he was raised to new life on the first day of the week.

Ma'afu Palu has recently analysed the conception of time in the Gospel of Mark.[29] Jesus, he says, renews and fulfils the covenant that God once made with time. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). God sanctified the time of the world and of man, and he promised through the prophets that there would be fulfilment. God brought about this fulfilment in Jesus and in the realisation of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by him. In earthly time, the name of the Eternal can only be a beginning, as it embraces and also transcends every moment of time.

[1] *For a theology of time see O. Cullmann, Christ and Time. The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History (original German Zürich 1948; revised 2nd edition with a new introduction London 1962). https://doi.org/10.2307/2216490 W. Beinert, "Theologie zur Zeit", Stimmen der Zeit 12/2012, 837-847.*

[2] *On the one hand, this also means that the narrator cannot tell everything he knows about Jesus and consequently the "historical Jesus" is always necessarily less than the "real Jesus." On the other hand, the peculiarity of storytelling can also be traced back to the fact that the evangelist did not always know the exact chronological order of events and their actual historical context, so he was forced to reproduce them in the order he created himself. The order of this editing must, of course, be determined on a case-by-case basis, as far as possible.*

[3] *Cf. L. Schenke, Das Markusevangelium. Literarische Eigenart – Text und Kommentierung (Stuttgart 2005) 12. By this I do not want to deny the meaningful, but rather implicit and paradoxical parallels of the via crucis of Jesus on the one hand, and the via triumphalis on the other. Cf. A. T. Georgia, "Translating the Triumph: Reading Mark's Crucifiction Narrative against a Roman Ritual of Power", Journal for the Study of the New Testament 36 (2013) 17-38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X13495132*

[4] *It seems that the Gospel of John placed great emphasis on Jewish feasts in following the story of Jesus. This is the writing in which we can find three mentions of Pesach (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55) and other Jewish feasts (5:1; 7:2; 10:22). Cf. M. Marcheselli, "Percezione e raffigurazione del tempo nel Vangelo secondo Giovanni", In: D. Garribba (ed.), Costruzioni del tempo nelle prime communitá cristiane. Atti del XVII Convegno di Studi Neotestamentari (Venezia, 14-16 settembre 2017). Ricerche Storico Bibliche 31 (2019) 147-184. Here 164-182. Further see I. Müllner, P. Dschullnigg, Jüdische und christliche Feste. Perspektiven des Alten und Neuen testaments (Die Neue Echter Bibel Themen 9; Würzburg 2002). https://doi.org/10.15581/006.37.13555*

[5] *For further studies see R. A. Monastero, "Jesús y el tiempo", In: D. Garribba (ed.), Costruzioni del tempo, 93-112.*

[6] *On narrative analysis, see J.-L. Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us". Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (Subsidia Biblica 13; Roma 1990); https://doi.org/10.1163/1568533972651630 D. Marguerat, Y. Bourquin, Pour lire les récits bibliques. Initiation á l'analyse narrative (CERF 1998); https://doi.org/10.4000/rsr.1893 J.-L. Ska, J.-P. Sonnet, A. Wénin, Analyse narrative des récits de l'Ancien Testament (Cahiers évangile 107; Paris 1999); J. P. Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative. An Introductory Guide (Westminster John Knox Press 1999); https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004397484 Martos L. B., "Narratív kritika és igehirdetés. Közelítések az exegézis és a homiletika között", In: Tarjányi B. (ed.), Út, igazság, élet. Biblikus tanulmányok (Budapest 2009) 115-138.*

[7] *All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, available online at www.biblegateway.com.*

[8] *Cf. S. Grasso, Vangelo di Marco. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento (Milano 2003) 34-37.*

[9] *For a detailed analysis of the prologue to the Gospel of Mark see Simon T. L., Az üdvösség mint esély és talány. Közelítések a Márk-evangéliumhoz (Lectio divina 12; Bakonybél & Budapest 2009) 113-157.*

[10] *Cf. M. Ebner, "Das Markusevangelium", In: M. Ebner, S. Schreiber (eds.), Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Studienbücher Theologie 6; Stuttgart 2008) 154-183, here 162; H.J. Klauck, Vorspiel im Himmel? Erzähltechnik und Theologie im Markusprolog (BThSt 32; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1997).*

[11] *Compared to the text of the LXX, the narrator altered the quotation, adding a second-person singular address, thereby creating this "dialogue."*

[12] *As Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it in the title of one of his books: Das Ganze im Fragment – 'the whole in the fragment.'*

[13] *Cf. B. Standaert, Marco. Vangelo di una notte vangelo per la vita. Commentario 1. Mc 1,1–6,13 (Bologna 2011) 87.*

[14] *Cf. B. Standaert, Marco 1., 106, which reads as follows: "In the tradition that goes back to Jesus, the talk about the Kingdom is implicitly about God himself."*

[15] *S. Légasse, Marco (original French 1997; commenti biblici; Roma 2000) 88.*

[16] *See e.g. G. Lohfink, Jesus von Nazaret. Was er wollte, wie er war (Freiburg Basel Wien 2011) 52-65. Gerhard Lohfink is certainly right to highlight the urgency with which Jesus calls on his listeners not to miss the one-of-a-kind opportunity of salvation (e.g. Lk 14:15-24).*

[17] *Cf. S. Légasse, Marco, 88-89; L. Schenke, Das Markusevangelium. 12-13.*

[18] *Cf. O. Cullmann, Christ and Time, 93: "It is not correct to say that in Christ '[timeless] eternity invades time,' 'conquers time.' We must rather say that in Christ time has reached its mid-point, and that at the same time the moment has thereby come in which this is preached to men, so that with the establishment of the new division of time they are able to believe in it and in this faith to understand time 'in a Christian way,' that is, by taking Christ as the center."*

[19] *Cf. J. R. Donahue, D. J. Harrington, The Gospel of Mark (Sacra Pagina Series 2; Collegeville, Minnesota 2002) 397.*

[20] *This extraordinary scene seems to turn the three narratives of crossing the sea upside down: in the latter, Jesus sleeps whereas in the former, the disciples sleep; in the latter the disciples fear for their lives, whereas in the former Jesus does. However, while the disciples proved to be of little faith, Jesus shows his unwavering faith and full trust.*

[21] *For the following see L. Schenke, Das Markusevangelium, 13-14.*

[22] *Cf. M. Ebner, "Das Markusevangelium", 157. For a similar and hermeneutically interpreted structure of the gospel of Mark see E. S. Malbon, Mark's Jesus. Characterization as Narrative Christology (Baylor University Press, Waco 2009) 27-43.*

[23] *Mk 16:9-20 cannot be the original ending of the Gospel of Mark for reasons of textual criticism, content and stylistic considerations. Rather it seems to be an addition to the narrative based on the stories of the other three Gospels. It is possible that it originally had a different ending, but there is no direct evidence of this. The present text of the Gospel is therefore attempted to be interpreted in the manner described here, as an invitation to the reader. Cf. H. Timm, "Sub contrario. Márk evangéliumának krisztopoétikája", In: Thomka B., Horváth I. (eds.): Narratívák. Narratív teológia (Pécs 2010) 240-250; M. Ebner, "Das Markusevangelium", 179-180.*

[24] *B. Standaert, Marco 1, 88.*

[25] *L. Schenke, Das Markusevangelium. 14-15.*

[26] *Cf. F. de Carlo, "Dal principio della creazione (Mc 10,6; 13,19). La riscrittura marciana della Genesi", In: E. Manicardi, L. Mazzinghi (eds.), Genesi 1-11 e le sue interpretazioni canoniche: un caso di teologia biblica. XLI Settimana Biblica Nazionale (Roma, 6-10 Settembre 2010); Ricerche Storicho Bibliche 24 (2012) 227-254. De Carlo speaks of the relecture of Genesis with the Apocalypse in mind, that is, in the light of the final and definitive changes in Jesus Christ. The prophesised difficulties in chapter 13 depict a cosmic vision of what is going to happen to Jesus in a personal way on the cross in chapter 15. Darkness and loneliness in the hour of the crucifixion fulfil and reinterpret the beginning of the world in chaos and darkness. De Carlo comes to this "relecture" by observing the parallels between Mk 1:1 and Gen 1:1, Mk 6 and Gen 1 (bread/nutriment for the living); Mk 10 and Gen 1-2 (question of divorce, creation of man and woman), Mk 13 and Gen 6-9 (eschatological and primordial chaos). These parallels seem less convincing than the concept of fulfilment, spoken of at the beginning of the Gospel, paired with the seven weeks of the story represented by the references to the Sabbaths.*

[27] *The first account of creation in Genesis 1 is of special importance with regard to the time and days of creation. The order of the seven days reflects, first, the order recognisable in the created world, and, secondly, the feast of Sabbath, which binds creation to God as an everlasting, imperishable sign.*

[28] *I must touch on the best-known difference between the two forms of the Sabbath commandment in the two versions of the Ten Commandments here. Whereas Exodus 20:8 tells us to "remember" the Sabbath, adding a reference to the divine act of resting after creation, Deuteronomy 5:12 calls on us to "observe it and keep it holy" and refers to the Exodus, God's saving and liberating act. O. Lukács, Sabbath in the Making. A Study of the Inner-Biblical Interpretation of the Sabbath Commandment (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 97; Leuven Paris Bristol 2020) 45-52 argues that both "remembering" and "keeping/observing" belong to the specific vocabulary of Deuteronomy, but it is hardly possible to decide which is the original expression. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1q26m4t.4*

[29] *M. Palu, Jesus and Time: An Interpretation of Mk 1,15 (LNTS 468; Bloomsbury 2012).*