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The proposal

On a superficial view, the earliest and supposedly most primitive of the four gospels seems to constitute a strong argument *against* finding “philosophy at the roots of Christianity”. However, when Mark is read in the context of contemporary Jewish allegorical hermeneutics another possibility arises.

a. The nature of Mark’s gospel. In this paper it is argued that Mark was *written* the way Philo *interpreted* the biblical narratives about the lives and journeys of Abraham and Moses, the founders of the Jewish people. They are stamped images of God’s logos, sophia and pneuma as active in history. Their travel activities are the outward appearance of their knowledge, which has been transformed by God’s logos (etc.), a knowledge which the allegorical reader will recognise as the defining mark and nature of God’s elected people and as constituting his own kinship with the founders. The various locations and people that are left behind on Abraham’s and Moses’s journeys constitute deficient or lower levels of knowledge and ethics in the unified epistemological, cosmological and anthropological framework that is allegorically plotted onto the geo-, ethno- and topographical space of the journeys.

While Philo would not have been impressed by the level of philosophical sophistication in Mark’s outlook, he might have recognised that for his own purposes Mark employed “low-tech” versions of key philosophical ideas that went into a distinctive kind of allegorical hermeneutics that was invented and practised by philosophers like Philo himself.

b. The function of Mark’s gospel. Neither Mark nor Philo was engaged in “doing philosophy” in the strictly technical manner of elaborating definitions of *dogmata* culled from the

writings of the classical philosophers. Instead, they adapted and modified philosophical ideas to constitute the rational basis for an allegorical hermeneutics that became part of a cultural revision and an ethnic strategy. Philo's allegorical *interpretation* of scripture consists in an inscription of ideas and values from contemporary philosophical culture into the writings of Moses, the law and the history of the Jewish people; in this way Philo reshaped Jewish ethnic identity and argued for the cultural superiority of law-abiding Judaism: the universal logos was perfectly embodied nowhere else than in the exclusive particularity of Jewish history, law and way of life (cf. Dawson 1992). I shall argue that Mark's allegorical *composition* applies a modified framework of philosophical ideas for the purpose of performing a similar inscription of key *Pauline* ideas and values, including Paul's cosmologically framed wisdom Christology and epistemology, into the scattered traditions about Jesus. By means of allegorical *composition* Mark continued the aim and strategy of Paul's allegorical *interpretation* of scripture, the law and the Jewish ethnic identity markers in the construction of a Christ-believing identity *vis-à-vis* non-Christ-believing, law-abiding Jews. Philo, Paul and Mark were engaged in competing constructions of ethnic identity and the scriptural heritage within variant forms of a shared rational discourse of allegorical hermeneutics.

It goes without saying that this fairly complex and general thesis cannot in any way be argued through in a relatively short paper. Here I shall presuppose my own understanding of Philo and Paul, which I have elaborated elsewhere (Tronier 2001), and try to make the case for my reading of Mark as convincing as possible within the available space. This enterprise is particularly difficult since it basically comes down to proving that there actually is an allegorical level in Mark's gospel – and proving the presence of allegory seems uncomfortably close to being a contradiction in terms.

I shall first present my understanding of Philonic allegory. Then I shall present – in a bird's eye view – my overall reading of Mark on the supposition that I am right in positing an alle-

gorical level all through this gospel. And then I shall consider in more detail certain focal points in Mark 3:13-8:21 in order to show that Mark himself points to the existence of the allegorical level of understanding his own story. Through this process the reader will gradually be led into the fairly radical *change of perspective* on Mark's text that constitutes the essence of my proposal. At the same time, I myself gradually become more and more specific about particular passages in Mark that distinctly support my claim for an allegorical level in this gospel. Finally, in the conclusion I shall spell out how my proposal will support the claim that there is philosophy at the roots of Christianity (or at least, as in this case, of the New Testament as instantiated by the Gospel of Mark).

Philonic allegory

One basic characteristic of Philo's allegorical readings of the Hebrew Bible stories is that he maintains the literal, historical truth character of these stories. For Philo, Abraham and Moses were indisputably individual historical persons who said and did what is told in the Torah. Philo never denies the historicity of those figures in his text which also function as allegorical symbols. This understanding of allegory is markedly different from the kind of allegorical interpretation that we find among Stoics in Philo's time, e.g. Cornutus and Heraclitus. Although the claim might at first seem counter-intuitive, this crucial characteristic of Philonic allegorical hermeneutics is due to its Platonic rationality.

In contrast to a widespread taxonomy of the various ancient allegorical interpretations in terms of subject matter (as "physical", "ethical", "metaphysical" or the like), the German historian of philosophy W. Bernard (1997) – who has been followed by G. Sellin (1997) – has pointed out that they all belong to either of two kinds that differ in terms of the basic method of interpretation. He calls them "substitutive" and "diairetical". The substitutive kind goes back to the pre-Socratic philosophers and was handed down and practised primarily by the

Stoics. Here etymology was the dominant principle of argument and Stoic physics and ethics were the primary content. When a given text (by Homer or Hesiod or the like) said A (e.g. “Hera”), the meaning was something else, B (e.g. “air”, from “aer”). A (the goddess Hera) did not exist in the real world and was to be substituted by B, which gave the only real meaning of the text and the only existing object in the real world. This picture, then, accords fully with the Stoic monism. Diaretical allegoresis, on the other hand, which according to Bernard was a much later and wholly independent kind of allegorical methodology, was based on a Platonic duality. The word A in a given text actually refers to a particular object, A, in the empirical world of particular phenomena. And this object is the image of an idea, B, which in its conceptual relations to other ideas in the universal, intelligible world of ideas gives the word and object A its “other” meaning. This picture directly reflects a Platonic epistemological and ontological duality.

I shall come back in a moment to the question of the genesis of Philo’s Platonically inspired allegorical hermeneutics. (Plato himself and the early Academy did not practise allegorical interpretation. They actually scorned the Stoic allegorists.) Here we shall leave Bernard behind to note in slightly more detail the Platonic framework of Philo’s interpretation of scripture. I must confine myself to two treatises that are particularly promising for the study of Mark and focus on Abraham: *De Migratione Abrahami* (*Migr.*), an allegorical commentary on Gen 12:1-4.6, and *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* (*Her.*), and allegorical commentary on Gen 15:2-8. The two treatises are closely related. Since Gen 15:1 and 15:7 take up God’s command to Abraham about migration in Gen 12:1-2, substantial parts of Philo’s interpretation in *Migr.* reappear in *Her.*

The very first words of *Migr.* are a quotation from scripture (Gen 12:1-3): God commands Abraham to depart from his land, his kindred, and his father’s house, into the land that God will show him. By stating the meaning of each individual symbol (*symbolon* in *Migr.* 2), Philo

argues that the full, allegorical meaning of Abraham's migration concerns the soul and its salvation (*Migr.* 2): God's transformation by means of his logos of the soul from the state of mere sense-perception, ruled by the body (cf. *Migr.* 2-3), into a transcendent noetic vision of the intelligible world of God's logos itself (cf. *Migr.* 4ff) as the ruler of sense-perception and the body (cf. *Migr.* 7ff).

Thus, at the very outset of his treatise Philo presents to his reader the basic philosophical framework for the allegorical interpretation of the meaning of Abraham's migration. The influence here of Platonic philosophy is indisputable. In *Migr.* 1-12 Philo presents to the reader a unified system of dualities. The central duality in the concrete interpretation of Abraham's migration is the *epistemological* one between mere sense-perception and noetic apprehension. The corresponding *ontological* duality is presented in terms of the objects of the epistemological duality, as a duality between the objects of sense-perception ("things at which we can point or that fall under sense-perception", *Migr.* 5, LCL tr.) and the objects of the noetic vision: the intelligible, noetic world of God's logos (things that are "invisible, withdrawn from sight, and apprehended only by soul as soul", *ibid.*, that is, the mind, *nous*, cf. also, e.g., *Her.* 55ff). Finally, there is the *anthropological* duality between the body – itself an object and the place of sense-perception – and soul, or its rational part, *nous*, which is an instrument for the transcendent, noetic vision and conceptual activity. (I leave out here the fourth duality between speech and noetic apprehension.)

In Philo's understanding, all three dualities are unified under the concept of logos, which plays a central role both epistemologically, ontologically and anthropologically, but is especially emphasised by Philo in its epistemological role. Ontologically, the logos constitutes the intelligible world, and it was the instrument by which God created the whole world and continues to maintain its order (cf. *Migr.* 5). Anthropologically, it was also a vision of this logos that Moses received when his *nous* had been epistemologically transformed by the logos so as

to become able noetically to apprehend the intelligible world (cf. *Migr.* 6). This has the consequence that when Moses's text itself tells about Abraham's historical migration in the past, it contains an implied allegorical meaning. However, this meaning in itself reflects the fact that Abraham's *nous*, too, had been epistemologically transformed by the very same logos in a manner that then *results* in his historical, geographical migration (cf. *Migr.* 7). In this way Philo anchors his postulate of two levels of meaning – the literal and the allegorical one – to be found in the historical facts of Abraham's migration no less than in Moses's account of them in a thoroughly Platonic world-view. The literal meaning corresponds to sense-perception, to the visible, particular objects of sense-perception and to the body. The allegorical meaning, by contrast, corresponds to the noetic vision, to the intelligible, invisible world and to the rational part of the soul, *nous*.

This comprehensive framework for Philo's reading of Moses's account of Abraham's migration has an important consequence for the way Philo sees Abraham's concrete doings. As an example of the particular actions and words which – even in the case of Abraham, who was a “living law” – also constitute the particular practice of the law, Abraham's doings are, as it were, God's logos in visible action (cf. *Migr.* 127-130). The consequence of this is that by this constructive application of Platonic dualities, Philo achieves a rational, hermeneutical basis for claiming that the *universal*, transcendent world of God's logos (ontology) and the perfected, transcendent vision and knowledge of that world (epistemology and anthropology) are historically stamped *only* in the particular, historical, visible, bodily actions and words of those elect men of wisdom in Israel's past. In the case of Abraham, since his migration took the form of a travel activity that *separated* him from his own origin, there is the further consequence that Philo may now use the Platonic framework behind his allegorical interpretation for the purpose of defining a specific Jewish ethnic identity that separates Jews from all

others. Elsewhere, too, Philo interprets the story about Moses and Israel's migration out of Egypt with the same focus on Jewish identity and separation.

This comes out clearly in the *Quis Heres*. As the title indicates, *Her.* addresses the issue of the identity and nature of the descendants of Abraham and the heirs to God's covenant with Abraham with its promise of land and a great people. In *Her.* 277-279 Philo once again quotes Gen 12:1-2. By migrating from his kinsfolk in the land of the Chaldaeans, Abraham had come to dwell *apart* from his family by blood (*aph' haimatos*, 277).

For we read, "the Lord said unto Abraham 'depart from your land and from your kinsfolk and from the house of your father unto the land which I shall show you, and I will make you a great people (*ethnos mega*)'". Was it reasonable that he should again have affinity with the very persons from whom he had been alienated by the forethought of God? Or that he who was to be the leader (*hêg-emôn*) of another people and race (*ethnos kai genos heteron*) should be associated with that of a former age (*to palaion*)? God would not bestow on him a fresh and in a sense new people and race (*kainon tropon tina kai neon ethnos kai genos*), if he were not cutting him right adrift from the old. Surely he is indeed the founder of the people and the race (*ethnarchês gar kai genarchês*), since from him, as from a root (*kathaper apo hrizês*), sprang the young plant called Israel (*onoma Israêl*), which observes and contemplates all the things of nature (*Her.* 277-279, LCL tr. modified).

Here the identity marker of God's elected people, as founded by Abraham in his geo- and ethnographical migration, is of an epistemological nature (cf. the end of the quotation). The same goes for the borderline and separation from other *ethnê* and for the dichotomy itself between "old" and "new". Philo does not operate with a simple dichotomy between an ethnos of blood and an ethnos of cognition. Rather, the Chaldaeans, at the *same* time as they are Abraham's family by blood, are also basically defined by their epistemological nature as determined by mere sense-perception and a deficient level of understanding (cf. *Her.* 289). *That* is why Abraham had to leave them behind, thereby founding a new ethnos, Israel, that is defined by the same transcendent apprehension that led to Abraham's geographical migration. Abraham's descendants (cf. *Quis Heres?*) are those who share *this* kind of kinship with Abraham.

Who, then, are these people? Who belongs to the new people elected by God and founded by Abraham? The answer is given at the end of *Quis Heres*: it is the wise man who has himself received God's sophia and been transformed by the diairetical activity of God's logos, that is, the allegorical readers of scripture themselves¹, people who like Philo himself will recognise that the allegorical meaning of a text that tells about Abraham's (and Moses's) historical migration(s) is themselves since *they* are precisely defined by having activated the transcendent epistemological nature given by God's logos and by their capacity to apprehend the whole Platonic system of dualities from which we began in the form in which Philo finds it in scripture. In short, the "community of interpretation" (in the form of a community of allegorical hermeneutics) that constitutes Philo's own Jewish community embodies the universal, transcendent logos, sophia and pneuma of God and the meaning itself of Moses's writings about creation, the history of Israel and the law.

This highly actualizing understanding of scripture also has the consequence that Philo may plot rival ethnic groups and representatives of competing philosophical and theological positions in his own time and place into the biblical narrative as representatives of the kind of deficient level of understanding and ethical practice that are left behind by Philo's heroes in their migrations. For instance, Philo's Chaldaeans have Stoic features, which Abraham is fortunately able to transcend; also, they represent the notion of kinship by blood *only*, which is another feature that Abraham transcends; further, the Egyptians are generally ruled by their passions; and more of the same kind. All through, Philo's Platonically informed, allegorical reading of scripture points to his actualizing aim of defining a distinct, Jewish ethnic identity: who are in and who are out, and why.

¹ The Platonic diairetical logic of Philo's allegorical hermeneutics was originally pointed out by Christiansen 1968 (cf. Tronier 2001), followed by Bernard and Sellin.

I promised to address the question of the genesis of this specific kind of allegoresis. We may bring out my proposal by contrasting the insights formulated by W. Bernard/G. Sellin and D. Dawson respectively. Bernard and Sellin have seen from the perspective of the history of philosophy that Philo's type of allegoresis differs sharply from the otherwise current, Stoic one and that it has a Platonic pedigree. They have also noted that Philo is the earliest source for this new type of allegoresis and that it came into being shortly before Philo. They have not, however, seen its social function. Dawson saw the latter: how Philo attempts to upgrade the Jewish heritage through the inscription of Hellenistic philosophical categories into the Jewish scripture for the purpose of insisting on Jewish particularity based on the unique excellence of Jews. That is, Dawson saw the social function and *use* of Philo's allegorising, in contrast with the use of allegory that one finds, for instance, in Cornutus. But Dawson did not see the formative role of Platonism for Philo's allegorising over against the Stoic allegorists.²

In the light of this, I propose that we may combine the two types of insight on either side. We know that there was a beginning renaissance of Platonic philosophy (so-called Middle Platonism) in Alexandria just before Philo. We also know that the issue of Jewish ethnic identity was a burning one in Alexandria around the same time. May we not take it, then, that it was the Jewish Alexandrian milieu in Philo's time that created this special kind of allegoresis *for the purpose of* articulating a special kind of Jewish ethnic identity that would solve the problems of the day? That purpose could not be served by Stoic allegoresis.

It is against this background that we should understand Mark. But first a word about Paul.

Philo and Paul

In Paul we find certain similarities with Philo in the basic form of his thought, but also some striking differences. Like Philo, Paul operates with a "community of interpretation" which

² Boyarin 1994 sees the presence of Platonic philosophy in Philo's allegoresis, but not this distinctive use of it.

through a transformation of the understanding that has been generated by revelation and reception of the spirit sees the heavenly Christ as *sophia* (cf. 1 Corinthians 1-2). Through this transformation the community itself comes to constitute a heavenly, “spiritual” Christ *ethnos* – which is also true Judaism, God’s Israel and made up of the descendants of Abraham – by having undergone a cognitive transformation from being anchored in the earthly world to being anchored in the heavenly world, through a transformation that corresponds with Christ’s literal and cosmic movement from heaven to earth and back again.

Unlike Philo, however, who gave special significance to the traditional Jewish ethnic borderline and status hierarchy defined by the practice of the law by tying them to insight into the universal *logos*, Paul turns both this borderline and any other traditional status hierarchy upside down, by employing Christ’s physical movement from heavenly glory to earthly disgrace as a principle of interpretation (cf. Philippians 2 and 3). Thus in Gal 4:21-31, which Paul himself explicitly calls an “allegorical” interpretation of the story of Sarah and Hagar, he places Christ-believing, Gentile Galatians in the place where non-Christ-believing, law-abiding Jews would normally place themselves, and conversely. Where Philo saw the traditional Jewish ethnic status hierarchy and its borderline vis-à-vis Gentiles as an *image* of the *logos*, Paul sees it as a *counter-image* of Christ since in his cognitive and cosmological model he has produced an apocalyptic radicalization of the two levels of Plato’s ontology: from a separation which is conceptual only and operates according to a model of image-reality (Philo) to a real, spatial dualism, which operates with a model of counter-image/reality in the tradition of apocalyptic cosmology and hermeneutics of re-evaluation (Paul).³

Mark in general

³ Boyarin 1994 has pointed to the allegorical nature of Paul’s interpretation of Jewish law and identity markers. However, as regards the precise relationship between Philo and Paul we part company.

It is within this overall setting that we should understand Mark's geographical and biographical staging of the Christ figure, of Jesus's "way" (which is the basic symbol of the gospel of Mark). Mark is a text about hermeneutics in the form of the proper understanding of Christ, which is developed in allegorical form at the same time as it maintains the basic historicity of the story, just as Philo did. But just as Paul had done, Mark, too, turns Philo's picture upside down by offering a reversal of the traditional Jewish ethnic borderline and status hierarchy.

Had Philo read Mark (as of course he could not have done), he might have been struck by two observations: Mark's obsession with the issue of understanding and the connection of this motif with the basic composition of the gospel with its distinctive shifts in the pattern of Jesus's travel activity.

Through all the figures that surround the Christ figure, Mark presents his hermeneutic theory – the Messianic secret, the allegorical parable theory (see below), the cognitive character of the healings, the ironic misunderstandings, the failure to understand on the part of the disciples and their relative progress from the first to the second part of the story – as connected with the movements through space of the Christ figure. All of this corresponds with Philo's interpretations of the figures that surround the central biblical figure as expressions of lower stages and states of understanding on the "way" towards the full understanding that is being developed by the central figure. In Mark, however, that understanding is only present on the other side of Christ's resurrection, that is, in the congregation itself for whom Mark wrote, the community of interpretation that consists of those who know the complete whole of Christ's "way" from beginning to end and employ their understanding of that "way" as a principle of interpretation.

More concretely, what Mark does at the most comprehensive level of composition of his gospel is to take the vertical movement of the Pauline Christ figure between heaven and earth and locate it narratively in the concrete geographical landscape of Palestine as a horizontal,

geographical movement between the periphery (Galilee and surroundings) and the centre (Jerusalem). The central importance of geography and spatial movements in Mark – already very well known in scholarship – comes out in the way the main sections of the gospel are characterised by distinct and different patterns of movement in geographical locations. Until Peter's confession in the middle of the gospel, Jesus moves around in the periphery, but in two different ways. First (Mark 1-3), he travels around in Galilee. Then (from Mark 4 onwards), there is a change to a different pattern of movement back and forth across the "sea", that is, back and forth across the borderline between Jewish and Gentile areas. When Peter has confessed Christ, there is another change in the pattern of movement, which occurs at the farthest (northernly) end of the periphery. Now we get a direct movement on Jesus's part towards the centre, Jerusalem. Once he has arrived there, there is yet another shift since Jesus now moves back and forth again across the city boundary of Jerusalem. This movement ends with his crucifixion and burial outside of Jerusalem. Finally, in connection with Jesus's resurrection there is the last change in the movement (16:7): as the resurrected one, Jesus will go back in a direct movement from Jerusalem to the periphery (Galilee) in a manner that constitutes a counter-image of his direct movement towards Jerusalem after Peter's confession.

If we compare this with the description of the Christ figure in Paul, we can see that the geographical location in the first part of the gospel (the periphery, Galilee) corresponds symbolically with the heavenly world in Paul. In Galilee Jesus appears as Christ with authority, power and glory, even though he is not generally recognized as such. By contrast, the geographical location of the second part of the gospel (the centre, Jerusalem) corresponds with the earthly world in Paul: the place where Christ appears as crucified and disgraced. Moreover, just as we find in the cosmic movement in Paul (from heaven to earth), so in Mark the direct, geographical movement from periphery to centre connects glory and authority with the cross. In fact, since the periphery is in Mark to be understood as the heavenly world, it makes

special sense that the starting-point for the direct movement towards the cross is located at the point where the disciples are as far out in the periphery as they will get, at Caesarea Philippi. Similarly, the disciples' *cognitive* starting-point, which is connected with the geographical one, is the full recognition by Peter of Jesus as the Christ of glory, a heavenly figure. Finally, it is in the periphery that Jesus returns as the glorious, resurrected one.

Seen in this light it is far from accidental that we get the explicit development in Mark of the Pauline paradigm of cognitive status reversal precisely when Jesus is moving directly from the periphery towards the centre. Just after Peter's confession, Mark as it were puts the travel account on stand by, installs Jesus in the house in Capernaum (9:33-50), which as an architectonic space functions within Mark's comprehensive allegory as a symbol for *the congregation*, and lets Jesus develop the overall meaning of the "way", which is that of status reversal. In his speech in the house, Christ becomes the principle of interpretation of the congregation for the benefit of the reader who has understood the implications for the existing status hierarchies of Jesus's travel from periphery to centre.

It is in this specific reading of the relationship between periphery and centre that Mark gives a crucial, corrective reply to Philo's ethnic strategy. In both Mark and Philo we find the movement from the periphery towards the centre. In Mark, however, the periphery stands for the *uppermost* level in his (apocalyptic) cosmology ("heaven"), whereas in Philo, the periphery stands for the lowest level in the cosmological structure generated by logos, and logos itself, that is, the transcendental world, is allegorically placed in the centre (the Promised Land) as the place of the Jewish ethnos.

Corresponding to this difference is the fact that it is in the periphery that the Markan Jesus proleptically – meaning: for the benefit of the readers and only as something recognised by the readers, not the people inhabiting the narrated world – establishes the new ethnos. This happens when *before* his direct movement towards the centre Jesus selects the twelve on the

mountain, moves back and forth across the “sea” and authoritatively transgresses and transcends the traditional Jewish borderline between Jews and Gentiles, moving *from* the Jewish area *to* the Gentile one. In this movement, Jesus also generates parallel events in the Jewish and Gentile areas focusing on purity and meals and on Jesus as the bread itself. Thus Jesus here *pre*-figures the eucharist, which is the new common meal that constitutes the new Christ ethnos and is shared by Jews and Gentiles alike, a meal that is then later – after the resurrection and Christ’s movement back from the centre to the periphery – realised among the readers in the light of the new insight they will by then have acquired. This whole “heavenly” ethnos is placed by Mark in the periphery, not in the centre. Correspondingly, what Jesus does in his travels across the “sea” is proleptically to tear down the traditional ethnic borderline between Jews and Gentiles. And what he does in his direct movement towards the centre and in the following movement back and forth across the city borderline is to dissolve Jerusalem as the centre (compare the treatment of the temple and the Jewish political and religious rulers in the second part of the gospel).

On such a general reading, Mark’s concrete account of Jesus’s life and “way” stands at the allegorical level for an account of the dissolution and transformation by a divine, cognitive figure of the traditional identity and boundary system of the Jewish ethnos. Through the hermeneutic competence that Mark’s readers possess as members of a community of interpretation of Gentile Christ believers, these readers will thus find themselves, their own identity, understanding, situation and practice (ethics) allegorically expressed in Jesus: in his “way” and the events that happen around him. With an understanding of the text itself as text that is the same as in Philo, Mark establishes a mirroring relationship between the figures he describes in his story and his readers. But where Philo did this in order to give significance to a traditional understanding of Jewishness shared by his readers, Mark lets his Jesus produce a different and new borderline between those who are inside and outside. Moreover, he does it

by taking over a whole number of traditional Jewish identity markers, together with their biblical warrants, and transferring them to the congregation of Christ believers. In this way Mark's Gentile Christ believers may – even *as* Gentiles – identify themselves as the true Israel, the true fulfilment of the law of Moses, the truly pure etc. Only, it happens on new, cognitive premises and with a new, reinterpreted content. Through this reinterpretation they also succeed in *excluding* the traditional form of Jewishness with which they are in competition. In this whole operation, Mark's interpretative project is the same as Paul's was twenty years earlier.

*Mark in more detail*⁴

To support this general reading of Mark, let us consider certain texts in somewhat greater exegetical detail. Can we find specific literary strategies in Mark's text that help to establish the allegorical character of his biographical account of Jesus and thereby also ensures that the reader will make the allegorical decoding of the text that will realise its hermeneutical purpose?

We would have an important piece of evidence for this if it turned out that there are texts in Mark that reflect what one may call its own "hermeneutics of reading". Does Mark himself spell out the allegorical hermeneutics that he *ex hypothesi* aims to make his reader apply to the story of Jesus? I suggest that this is what happens in the chapter on Jesus's parables (Mark 4). Here Jesus is presented as speaking both in and about parables. In addition, however, this text also has the strategic function in its literary context of setting up a specific reading perspective on what is told in the text that surrounds it. Moreover, this function is intimately tied to the project of rejecting the traditional Jewish ethnic markers and borderlines: now it is the

⁴ The following discussion is almost entirely devoid of references to scholars from whom I have learned. (Some of them are mentioned in the bibliography, though.) I would like to add here, however, that I have directly incorporated into my account some exegetical details from Iersel 1998.

allegorical reading competence itself that is said to constitute the redefined ethnic criterion that separates the new people of God from all others. By this kind of argument Mark moves into the same field as that of Philo and Paul. In order to see this we must follow the story line from 3:13 into chapter 4.

Before we do that, however, some brief notes on the prologue of Mark's gospel will be helpful.

1:2-13: The prologue as a hermeneutical programme

When Jesus enters the stage for the first time, at the baptism (1:9-11), a unified framework of dualities around Jesus are presented to the readers. (1) There is a cosmological duality: between the earthly and the heavenly worlds, the latter being the location of God's spirit. (2) There is an "epistemological" duality: God's heavenly spirit descends from the heavenly world and enables Jesus's transcendent vision (*eiden*) of the now open, but hitherto and otherwise closed, heavenly world. (3) Finally, this reception in Jesus's "interior" of the heavenly spirit, by which Jesus is declared the son of God (Christ), immediately results in visible, bodily activity: *Kai euthys to pneuma auton ekballei ...* (1:12) (an "anthropological" duality). In all this, the heavenly spirit unifies the "upper" level of the three dualities, and the readers are informed that the visible activity of Jesus as narrated in the gospel should from now on be seen as the outward appearance of an activity of the heavenly, descended spirit of the transcendent vision: *this* is how one should interpret the essential nature of Jesus's visible journey, his "way" – which is introduced at the very beginning of the prologue (1:2-3) by means of a mixed quotation from Ex 23:20, Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3 (LXX) which has as its common link the word *hê hodos*.

This hermeneutical function of the prologue is ruined by Matthew and Luke when they add the stories about Jesus's birth. In this way they in fact de-allegorise Mark and turn his pro-

logue into an account that belongs within the conventional genres of biography and history writing. This perspective has since then determined the reading of the story about Jesus even in Mark's Gospel.

Read in the suggested way, Mark's prologue functions as a hermeneutical direction to the readers. As has been noted by many modern commentators with a literary bend (for instance Iersel 1998), *only* the readers get to know what is narrated about Jesus's vision of the heavenly realm and the activity of the spirit – nobody in the narrated world does. As we shall see, this feature is continued through the subsequent sections of the gospel as part of the literary strategy by which Mark construes two levels of meaning: the people in the narrated world see and hear the visible actions and words of Jesus, but only the readers apprehend the spiritual level of meaning, which is communicated to them through various literary strategies.

Had Philo read the prologue, he might have recognised that something like his own introduction of dualities at the beginning of his allegorical interpretation of Abraham's journey is taking place here, although in a much more simplistic or "low-tech" version that makes use of the dualities of the apocalyptic outlook. However, it still needs to be argued that the hermeneutical programme of the prologue is pointing towards a distinctly *allegorical* interpretation of Jesus's way in the gospel. In order to see that, we need to follow Jesus a bit further along the way.

3:13-4:34: Allegorical reading competence as a new ethnic criterion

Mark 3:13-19, where Jesus appoints the twelve on the mountain, has programmatical weight since it constitutes the first pericope in the overall section that goes as far as 8:21 and is kept together by Jesus's movements across the "sea" that divides Jewish from Gentile areas. At the literal level, this little story has no very clear function or implications. By contrast its meaning is huge at a symbolic level. The mountain functions as a topographical symbol (cf. Malbon

1986) and the number 12 as a numerical one. The reader is thus led to decode a symbolic meaning through the clear literary echoes of Exodus: the twelve tribes of Israel, the covenant on Mount Sinai, God's election of the Jewish ethnos as his people, Moses's reception of the law, which prescribes the practice that sets this people apart from other nations (the Gentiles) and maintains the borderline between insiders and outsiders. Thus the reader is brought to decode the story of 3:13-19 as being about another, new election and covenant: the creation of a new people of God.

What are the criteria of separation? This is the question to which the following text of 3:20-35 provides an answer. At the literal level there is no immediate connection between these two texts. At the symbolical level there is. And this in itself is a sign of the more than literal, allegorical meaning of this whole text. Once it is decoded as an allegory, it can be seen as constituting a cumulative, comprehensive spelling out of the overall meaning of a number of discrete individual pericopes that directly tell about concrete, historical events.

3:20-35 is a story about Jesus's confrontation with two groups, his relatives and some scribes from Jerusalem. These two stories are woven together in a concentric composition that show that they should be read together as reciprocally illuminating one another. That makes good sense in relation to 3:13-19. Just after the event described here, where Jesus proleptically and symbolically pre-figures the founding of a new ethnos with a new covenant, Jesus is now confronted with what appears to be allegorical personifications of two quite basic markers of traditional Jewish ethnicity: (a) kinship by blood and (b) observance of the law, which separate insiders from outsiders and which Mark anchors in the geo- and ethnographical centre, Jerusalem. Here too, then, we have two individual symbols (like the mountain and the twelve above) which taken together point to an allegorical level of interpretation.

In Mark's account, Jesus's relatives and the scribes share a certain understanding of Jesus – a cognitive determination of his identity – which the reader has already been made to see in

a quite different way. The reader sees Jesus's acts as signs of his charismatic power, given to him by God in his baptism through the spirit. By contrast, the relatives and the scribes decode Jesus by connecting him with the opposite pole in the basic, cosmological opposition between, on the one side, God in the sphere of salvation, and on the other side the unclean spirits, the demons and their ruler, Beelzebul or Satan, in the sphere of damnation. Thus two opposing identifications of Jesus – those of the reader and those of the figures in the story who personify traditional Jewish markers – are inserted into an underlying, cosmic and apocalyptic dualism.

With this kind of apocalypticism as the criterion of understanding, the two personifications of the demarcation of what belongs inside Judaism are now placed outside the true ethnos. This is what is made clear by Jesus's reaction. All forms of sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, but one thing leads to damnation: blaspheming the holy spirit, which stands for the new, cognitive borderline of understanding, interpreting (grasping) and recognising Jesus's divine status. Thus the borderline between inside and outside the new people of God remains razor sharp, but its content and basic criterion have been redefined.

This redefinition logically implies a redefinition of the blood relationship, which constitutes the basic category of ethnicity, as is seen in Jesus's reaction to his family. Here the point is made clear already in Mark's account of the spatial relations between the agents. Jesus is placed in the middle with a group of adherents sitting around him (*peri auton (en kykloi)* in both 3:32 and 3:34), while the family is standing – and left standing – outside (*exo* in both 3:31 and 3:32) without being able to get into contact with him. In his reply Jesus reinterprets the blood relationship (and thereby the ethnic criterion that creates the boundary): his "family" consists of "those who do the will of God".

Taken together the two parts of 3:20-35 constitute a network of symbols that calls for an allegorical interpretation focusing on a redefinition and reversal of traditional Jewish ethnic

markers. The result is the idea of a new “spiritual” and cognitive ethnos, a new people of God which is defined as consisting of (1) a special *understanding* (of Jesus) and (2) a type of *practice* that follows from this understanding (namely, doing the will of God).

This comes close to Philo’s allegorical interpretation of Abraham’s migration from the Chaldeans, his family by blood, through which he became the founder of the new ethnos of perfected understanding and practice; only, in Philo this practice is practice of the law. As in Philo, however, the family by blood is not simply excluded as being family by blood but due to its deficient level of understanding. And just as Philo plotted into the story a rival theological position of his own time (the Stoic one) and connected it to the family by blood by a shared deficient level of knowledge, so Mark plots *his* rival group’s position, that of law-abiding Judaism, into the story and connects it to the family by blood by ascribing to both a deficient level of understanding.

In 3:20-35 Mark takes the first basic step in his allegorical account of Jesus’s boundary-crossing movement between Jewish and Gentile back and forth across the “sea” as described from 4:35 onwards until 8:21. Already in the summary (3:7-12) of the preceding major section, there is a short note about the boat that must be made ready (3:9). At this point in the story, the boat serves no function. Seen in retrospect, it makes the reader anticipate the movement to come across the ethnic borderline as a sign for the following major section (cf. Iersel 1998 ad loc.).

4:1-34 provides the next, crucial step in the preparation for this movement. In a direct line from 3:20-35, 4:1-34 develops the precise character of the redefined borderline. This is done by referring explicitly to a specifically cognitive criterion: the allegorical reading competence. It is only *after* this that Jesus engages in his allegorical travel back and forth across the “sea”. Thus 4:1-34 brings the reader one more crucial step forward by providing an even more explicit hermeneutical indication about how to decode the text.

In 4:1 Jesus at last makes use of the boat, though still only in a preparatory manner. Mark goes out of his way to describe the spatial relationships between the various agents. The crowd is standing “at the sea” and “on the earth”. Jesus, however, “enters the boat” and “sits [!] on the sea”. From here Jesus “teaches” the crowd. Thus Mark indicates both a certain *distance* between Jesus’s teaching and the crowd that is standing on the Jewish side of the “sea” and also the fact that Jesus’s teaching in some way *controls* the “sea”.

Corresponding to the distance is the fact that Jesus teaches in parables, which according to 4:10-12 are unintelligible to “those outside”. As a paradigm example of Jesus’s teaching the reader gets the parable of the seed and the soil (4:3-9). The fundamentally hermeneutical purpose of the chapter is already made clear in the framework of this parable: “Let the one who has ears hear!”. This purpose is clarified in 4:10-12, which comes between the parable itself and its interpretation. This division corresponds to two different situations. Jesus’s teaching in parables is directed to the crowd, a broad audience, whereas the interpretation of the parable is exclusively given to those in the immediate circle around Jesus, in separation from outsiders. Correspondingly, the borderline between inside and outside is thematised once more in 4:10-12, where Mark employs exactly the same terms as in the redefinition of the basic, ethnic identity markers in 3:20-25. There, the issue was the reading competence in relation to Jesus’s *acts*. Now, where the issue is the reading competence in relation to his *teaching* (in parables), Mark once more draws a cognitive borderline between those around him (*hoi peri auton*, 4:10, cf. 3:32, 34) and outsiders (*hoi exo*, 4:11, cf. 3:31, 32): “For those outside everything happens in parables”, but what “happens” is defined in cognitive categories when Mark develops his special theory of parables with a quotation from Isa 6:9-10.

As will become clear, the resonance of the context of a quotation from the Hebrew Bible (so-called *metalepsis*) is an important literary strategy on Mark’s part for the purpose of establishing the meaning of his text to his readers. In Isaiah 6, the hardening in the form of an in-

ability to understand what they see and hear is a part of God's punishment, rejection and condemnation of the Jewish people (Judah/Israel) as part of his creation of a new eschatological people of God. In the immediate context this is described metaphorically as a tree that is cut down. The stem that is left over is "holy seed" (Isa 6:13 LXX, cf. Iersel 1998 ad loc.). From this the eschatological people of God will sprout (cf. also Isa 11:1ff). As we saw, this is exactly the imagery that Philo used too about the new *ethnos* founded by Abraham's migration.

Through these connotations the reader of Mark 4:10-12 will hear the theme of ethnicity, the redefinition of the borderline that sets apart the people of God, which has been the one comprehensive theme of the allegory since 3:13. The kind of punishment, rejection and condemnation that is said to come over the Jewish people (Judah/Israel) is once more defined by Mark in cognitive categories. Outsiders are irredeemably outside (thus there is no forgiveness, according to 4:12c) in the sense of not being able to understand Jesus's *parables* in exactly the same way in which the personifications of the traditional Jewish ethnic markers were defined as being irredeemably outside (with no forgiveness in all eternity, according to 3:19) by not being able to understand Jesus's *acts*. Conversely, what is inside is defined in terms of the ability to interpret and understand Jesus's parables. This ability constitutes the redefined criterion of ethnicity for the new, promised people of God.

Who, then, constitute this people? First, the interpretation of the parables given by Jesus immediately after the quotation from Isaiah shows that the new people of God is made up of the Markan congregation itself, that is, the intended readers in the particular situation in which they find themselves. Each separate part of the parable is interpreted as a symbol for the reaction of different groups to the word as preached in the missionary situation of Mark's own time. The "seed" is understood to be the *logos* (!), which is a technical term for the early church's preaching of the gospel. Among the reactions of the different groups is, on the negative side, either direct rejection or else a form of acceptance which is nevertheless followed by

defection due to persecution or does not bear moral fruit due to the vices of this world. (The latter situation is described by means of a range of terms that are characteristic of the par- aenesis of the early church.) On the positive side are those who accept the word and bear moral fruit. Thus there is a direct connection back to the definition of the new, double ethnic criterion given in 3:20-35: *understanding* (of Jesus) and *practice* (of the will of God). It follows that the new people of God of Isaiah 6 is the Markan congregation itself, the intended readers as having a specific understanding and the kind of practice that follows from that.

Second, the new people of God is made up of the readers not just by the fact that the par- ables are about them, but also because they alone are in possession of the competence for interpreting Jesus's parables which is defined in 4:10-12 as constituting the new ethnic cri- terion itself. Here it is important to pay close attention to Jesus's words to the group around him: "To you has been given the secret (*to mysterion*) of the kingdom of God". In Paul, the term *mysterion* may be used for Christ's appearance in the world below, which is a general secret whose meaning is only revealed to the congregation of believers (1 Cor 2:6-16). Mark's formulation is ambiguous. To have a secret "given" to one is not necessarily identical with having received the *revelation* of the secret. Thus Luke (8:10) and Matthew (13:11) correct Mark: "... to *know* the secret of the kingdom of God" (cf. Iersel 1998 ad loc.). But the ambi- guity in Mark between hiddenness and revelation fits completely his hermeneutical and theo- logical point when he speaks of the Messianic secret and the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples. It is only on the other side of his suffering, death and resurrection that Jesus's life and "way" may be understood, in other words, at the time of the congregation and not (yet) by the disciples or the group around Jesus at the time of the story. It is the readers who are in possession of the competence for interpreting Jesus's parables which constitutes the new criterion for being inside the group. The group around Jesus symbolically pre-figures this criterion by constituting the space for (though not necessarily the full understanding of) the

interpretation of the meaning of the parable. This meaning, however, is constituted by – the *readers, their* situation, understanding and practice.

If we look even more closely at the programmatic formulation in 4:10-12, we see that this reading competence is concerned with more than the understanding of the immediately preceding parable of 4:3-9. To the outsiders “everything (*ta panta*) happens (*ginetai*) in parables”. Thus the form of the parable pertains not only to something that is said (and can be heard), that is, to Jesus’s words, but more generally also to everything that occurs, that is, all the events that take place around Jesus. (This is also what is referred to by the term *to mysterion*.) This fits exactly the two cognitive terms contained in 4:12: not just “hear and hear (the words) without grasping”, but also “*see and see* (the acts) without understanding”.

This, then, is the fundamental point: The chapter on the parables functions as a hermeneutical programmatic declaration to the readers about the way in which all events that involve Jesus as part of his “way” on earth are to be understood – and this means everything that is told in the Markan text itself. It is *all* something that happens in the form of a parable. According to Mark’s “theory of parables” in 4:1-34, this means the following. First, the Markan text is an account of certain events, both of which have two levels, an empirical level (seeing, hearing), which is visible to everybody, but is also in itself unintelligible to people who lack the specific reading competence that is required (the hardened outsiders), and a hidden level of a meaning (grasp, understand) which is only accessible to the especially elect. Second, the relationship between the two levels is that of a continuous series of symbolic relations, as is made clear by the relationship between the parable of 4:4-9 and its interpretation in 4:13-20. Each individual feature at the one level symbolises a feature at the other level, and all the features at the symbolised level enter into a combined set of meanings. This is exactly what we found to be constitutive of Philo’s allegorical hermeneutics. Third, the function of the use of parables is a hermeneutical one of establishing a borderline for the newly defined people of

God on the basis of a criterion that is cognitive, namely, the allegorical reading competence as applied to everything that happens around Jesus as well as in Mark's own story about Jesus: the Markan *text*, which its *readers* are intended to decode. Fourth, the allegorical meaning at the hidden level concerns the situation in which the congregation of the text's intended readers find themselves. Through allegorical interpretation they may see themselves, their situation, understanding and practice as constituting the allegorical meaning of everything that "happens in parables". Again, all of this comes close to Philo: the allegorical meaning of Abraham's journey is the allegorical readers themselves, their logos, their allegorical hermeneutics and their practice.

Summarising, we may say that Jesus's great speech on parables in Mark 4 reveals the basically hermeneutic character of the Gospel of Mark. The speech thematises the question itself of the reader's decoding of the gospel's own story. Not only is the Gospel of Mark itself written as an allegory: it also reflects on and spells out its own "reader hermeneutics" in allegorical form in Jesus's speech on parables. Mark 4 functions as a programmatic reading instruction by defining the hermeneutical key that is required to understand the story of Jesus as told in the gospel. This key is that of allegoresis directed to the situation in which the text's intended readers find themselves, their understanding and practice, their identity. Thus understood Mark is very close to Philo, who in his own allegoresis took the authoritative figures and stories of the Septuagint as the object of his interpretation for the purpose of providing a certain interpretation of what qualifies the true Jewish ethnos. Within a shared field of textual understanding and interpretative strategies, Mark attempts to qualify his own congregation of Gentile believers as the people of God in order to exclude those very people whom Philo, on his side, precisely attempted to qualify as the people of God in order to exclude the Gentiles!

We may pass fairly quickly over the series of parables given in 4:21-32, in which Mark leaves it to his readers to decode the parables by making use of the principle of allegory that

was explicitly and paradigmatically stated in 4:1-20. Throughout, Mark has Jesus continue with the metaphors of seeds, sprouts and trees that he had derived from the text in Isaiah. Throughout, the parables are also bound together at the allegorical level by their focus on cognition: the relationship between what is hidden and revealed, the exhortation to understand, understanding itself as a criterion of salvation, the growth of mission (and hence of understanding and acceptance of the logos) and the prospect of eschatological judgement on the basis of people's cognitive state. In the last parable of the four, Mark's Jesus implicitly focuses on the question of Gentiles as the "birds of heaven" that may find a dwelling under the wings of the tree (4:32) and – through the quotation from Ps 103:12 – on God's power to conquer the masses of water that threaten with chaos. In both ways, this parable points forward to the concluding section of the chapter (4:35-41), thereby showing that the overall point and function of 4:1-34 is to establish an allegorical reading perspective in the reader to be applied to "everything that occurs in parables" on Jesus's "way". This function is supported in literary and allegorical terms by the fact that the initial stages of the boat journey as it were run through the chapter on parables. In this way the allegorical reading perspective is programmatically formed in the reader when Jesus is under way on the boat travel. Thereby it also becomes a perspective *on* the boat travel.

4:35-41: The disciples' lack of understanding and intertextuality as hermeneutical and literary strategies

The speech on parables and the boat travel on the "sea" are brought together by the fact that they have the same stage setting and take place on the same day (4:35). Jesus takes the initiative to cross the "sea" to the other side. His disciples take him with them in "the" boat, that is, the same boat that was referred to in 4:1-2, and they together "leave the crowd behind" on the Jewish side (note *ho ochlos* in both 4:1 and 4:36). The story ends with a question: "Who is

this man, whom both the wind and the sea obey?“. This ending forces the question of understanding on the reader. Whereas the disciples, who have seen everything that happens, are unable to answer the question about Jesus’s identity and significance, the readers, who do have Christ faith, are forced to consider the question of understanding. But exactly what are the literary means through which this is achieved?

This is where we come across Mark’s use of literary predecessors as a way of constructing allegorical stories. This occurs through a combination of the motif of the disciples’ lack of understanding and intertextuality. Where the former activates the readers and makes them establish a superior position of understanding, the latter helps to fill in the content of this position by relating the concrete events of the actual stories told with a meaning that is derived from those authoritative pre-texts to which the Markan text is intertextually related. The most important among these pre-texts is evidently the Septuagint. Through this literary technique two levels of meaning are created that correspond to the allegorical hermeneutics spelled out in the parables chapter as a reading instruction for the readers. There is first the literal, immediate account which, at the level of the story, corresponds with what the disciples empirically see, the concrete events in the story as told. Next there is a superimposed level of meaning, which is not grasped by the disciples, but which the readers – who are being activated by the disciples’ lack of understanding – grasp by hearing echoes from the Septuagint that Mark brings to mind through the use of more or less discrete signs. This combined technique is employed to considerable effect in 4:35-41.

A first answer to the disciples’ question in 4:41 (“Who is this ...?”) is suggested to the readers if they manage to hear echoes in the event described in 4:39 of God’s creation of the world in the form of God’s battle with and victory over the seething sea viewed as a demonic power of chaos. The reference does not necessarily go to any one particular text in the Septuagint. Rather, as pointed out by several scholars, there is a broad motif here that is found in a

number of places (Ps 74:12-14; 89:16-21; Job 26:12-13; 38:8-10). This means that 4:39 turns into an epiphany, though only to the reader, not to the disciples, who only see the empirical surface of the historical events. In a sophisticated play on hiddenness and revelation, the readers decode 4:39 intertextually and understand that Jesus is similar to God, a divine being with the power of creation. In this way the story becomes an allegory that provides a christological identification of Jesus. This move is repeated in Mark 6:45-52 when Jesus walks on the “sea” and identifies himself as “I am” (*ego eimi*) to the fearful disciples who do not understand a thing. The readers, by contrast, decode these signs through their intertextual relations to various texts in the Septuagint, thereby understanding that in terms of their fuller meaning they are about God’s act of creation and God’s self-revelation. Thus there is a christological system to be found in Mark’s allegorical rendering of the boat journeys from the Jewish to the Gentile side of the “sea”: Jesus has a divine power of creation, which at the allegorical level pertains to the importance of Christ for the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

Two points follow from this. The first is about the relationship between narrativity and theological conceptuality. The intertextual relation that goes into the generation of allegorical meaning holds between two (or more) texts that are narrative in character: stories about events pertaining to Jesus at the “sea” or God in creation. However, through this kind of intertextual conjunction of narrative texts, their meaning is transformed in the readers’ decoding of them to achieve a more conceptual, theological character, in this case of genuinely christo-*logical* content: that Jesus is similar to God in his creative power. The same point may be put the other way round. What Mark is doing – by combining the literary motif of the disciples’ lack of understanding with intertextuality – is to “narrativise” a christological idea which is also found, for instance, in Paul (the idea of Christ as the preexistent, heavenly sophia through whom God created the world, cf. 1 Corinthians 1 and Philippians 2). Thus through his use of

this literary technique, Mark allegorically reinscribes this christology into the tradition about Jesus.

The second point follows from this. As is illustrated by both 4:39 and the second boat journey in 6:45-52, Mark's christology is no less "high" than that of Paul. If one thinks otherwise, one has stuck to the surface meaning of the text and has missed its intertextual resonances and their function as helping the reader to decode allegorically the meaning of Jesus as narrated.

4:35-41: Creation and ethnicity

The relationship between narrativity and theological conceptuality may be further illuminated if we move away from the fairly simple and strongly marked intertextual relation of 4:39 to God as a power of creation and turn now to certain other, rather more complex intertextual relations in the same text. In this way we may come to understand better why Mark chose to emphasise precisely the motif of creation for the allegorical account of Christ as a divine being in 4:39.

Already before 4:39, the Markan boat journey has been involved in a sophisticated interplay with another Septuagint text: the Book of Jonah. In 4:37 we come across a marker that is so strong that Nestle-Aland has even placed a reference to Jonah 1:4ff in the margin. Now, whereas 4:39 constitutes an echo of a *motif* to be found in many different texts, 4:37 constitutes an *allusion* to a single, definite text in the Septuagint. This means that we have to bring in the whole context of the text to which the allusion is made, in the way we also noted earlier in Mark 4 with respect to Isaiah 6. Through metalepsis and hearing the echoes of this broader context, the readers may come to see that there is a structural similarity between the story of Jonah and that of Jesus at this particular point on his "way". In both cases, the goal of all the narrated events and the overall theme of the texts themselves is the incorporation of Gentiles into salvation.

However, Mark uses the intertextual play on the Book of Jonah to great rhetorical effect in the following specific ways. (For some of these points, cf. again Iersel 1998 ad loc.) Like Jonah, Jesus is aboard a boat during a storm. But Jesus's role is not that of Jonah, but of God. Through his boat journey Jesus himself takes the initiative to realise what Jonah did *not* want to realise, but rather wanted to *escape* from – but then it was realised by *God*: the travel to a Gentile land and the incorporation of Gentiles into salvation. Correspondingly, there is an important reversal of the agent in relation to the storm that constitutes the explicit link between the two texts. In the Book of Jonah the agent is God, who acts for the purpose of preventing Jonah's flight *away* from a travel into Gentile land. In Mark, by contrast, the agent consists of demonic forces, which act for the purpose of preventing Jesus's way from Jewish *into* Gentile land.

These points may next be seen to connect with the other echo we noticed to the effect that Jesus is like God who in an act of creativity fights against and conquers the seething sea of demonic forces of chaos. This combination effects a radical change in the reader's allegorical decoding of the text. The ethnic borderline that separates Jewish from Gentiles and which in the traditional Jewish understanding has been set up by God and is guarded over by the Mosaic law through the election of the Jewish ethnos by the covenant on Mount Sinai (cf. Mark 3:13-19) – this borderline has in fact been established and is guarded over by demonic forces of chaos! In the traditional Jewish understanding, as well as in Philo (see *Her.*), one often finds the motif of combining the election of the Jewish people, including the separation from the Gentiles through the covenant on Mount Sinai, with God's act of creation. This can be seen already in Exodus itself. In Mark 4:35-41, by contrast, God's act of creation is seen in the battle *against* and victory *over* this ethnic borderline.

Thus we again find that beginning in 3:13 there is a tight and coherent construction of a network of symbols at the allegorical level. In 3:13-19 we had "a new covenant", "a new elec-

tion”, “a new people of God”; then this was spelled out in a reinterpretation of the traditional Jewish ethnic markers leading to a new, cognitive and “spiritual” criterion of ethnic separation; in the parables chapter this criterion was then defined more precisely as consisting in an allegorical reading competence; and now, in 4:35-41, we get “*new creation*” as a term of art for the restructuring of the traditional Jewish ethnic borderline.

Once more we see how Mark has reinscribed a Pauline theological concept into his narrative account of Jesus. In Galatians, Paul rejects the traditional Jewish ethnic markers by demonising the givers of the law (3:19-20) and the law itself (4:1-11 etc.) as the guardian of an ethnic borderline. At the end of the letter, he even summarises all of this in the metaphor of “new creation” (*kaine ktisis*). In Paul, “new creation” is a theological concept that expresses the *understanding* of Christ – given through the spirit, to be understood as a cognitive criterion of ethnicity – according to which the question of origin (whether Jewish or Gentile) no longer matters (6:14-16 and 3:28). In Paul, “new creation” is a *cognitive* event that takes place when the congregation is transformed by having Christ as its basic figure of cognition. This is exactly what Mark, too, spells out in the allegorical content of the story told in 4:35-41. And it is this understanding that his readers will decode allegorically as constituting the more comprehensive meaning of the story, a meaning that is also put into practice in the situation in which they, as Gentile believers, find themselves. Moreover, they will see all this by making use of the reading directions given in Jesus’s parables speech and the allegorical point made in the very last line of that speech.

Thus the concrete, literal story in Mark 4:35-41 of Jesus on the “sea” should be understood, at the allegorical level, as a story about general cognitive ideas in a cognitive universe. It is the story of a cognitive figure and a cognitive event, both of which are mirrored and realised in the readers’ own cognition and in the community of interpretation that is active when the gospel text is being decoded. What we have here, then, is a literal event and story

that is seen as constituting an expression of a more general and specifically cognitive level of meaning, all of which means that we are confronted here with a universe of interpretation that is in principle the same as what one finds in Philo. The ethnic direction, however, is the exact opposite. And here Mark places himself on the line of Paul, who also produced an allegorical interpretation of scripture (in Gal 4:21-31) and of the Jewish identity markers (Galatians 3-4 and Philippians 3, cf. Boyarin 1994) and who let this interpretation culminate in the idea of a new state of cognition which he described as a “new creation”. It is perhaps worth noting here that according to Galatians, the believers’ *way of understanding* all this in Christ was *initiated* in their reception of the spirit in *baptism* – the very starting-point of the *way of Jesus* in Mark’s allegorical composition.

5:1-8:21: The basic allegorical points

With regard to the remaining part of this section of the gospel, I have to confine myself to a few very brief comments – and here entirely without argument.

In Galatians 3-4 Paul had argued that Jewish and Gentile Christ-believers were in the same situation of slavery before the coming of Christ and the same situation of freedom after Christ. His aim was to introduce the idea of “no difference” in Christ. A similar strategy of understanding is allegorically stamped into Mark’s story about parallel historical events in Gentile and Jewish land after Jesus’s first crossing of the ethnic borderline, the “sea”. The situation of being dead, unclean, excluded and in slavery under demonic powers before Jesus’s arrival is symbolically personified in the Gentile man of 5:1-20 and again personified in the woman and the daughter in the Jewish land in the parallel story told in 5:21-43. With Jesus’s arrival, their situations are transformed into a new situation where there is life, a state of being clean and freedom and where a new borderline has been established that is defined by the acceptance or rejection of Jesus.

Mark 6:1-13 parallels Jesus's confrontation with his family and the scribes. He is now back again in his homeland where he confronts people who – once again – do not understand the origin of his actions (the spirit), because of their deficient decoding of Jesus by means of the categories of kinship by blood. Consequently, Jesus leaves them behind (notice the echo in 6:4 of Gen 12:1 on Abraham's migration) and proleptically initiates the movement of the missionaries (6:7-13).

The remaining part of this section is dominated by the motif of meals and bread. I have already hinted at the allegorical meaning of this, but let me just add a few observations.

As an introduction to this section, Mark narrates in 6:14-29 the incident about Herod and John the Baptist in a way that makes the reader see it as endowed with a symbolic meaning. What we get is a perverted counter-eucharist: a *deipnon* among the Jewish political leaders which is dominated by the passions of the body (sexual desires) and in which the head of John the Baptist is served on a plate. (Fortunately, I am not the only one to read the story like this; cf. Iersel 1998 ad loc.).

After the first feeding miracle in the Jewish area (6:32-44) follows the second expanded narrative about the crossing of the "sea" (6:45-52), where Jesus is again moving from Jewish land and heading for Gentile land. The disciples, by contrast, are themselves unable (1) to *cross the "sea"* and (2) to *apprehend Jesus's identity* – whereas the readers are once again able to do the latter by means of scriptural echoes which they allegorically decode as a revelation of God and his creative power ("walking on the sea", "passing by", "I am (*egô eimi*)"). The reason for the disciples' obtuseness is (3) their deficient *understanding about the loaves*. However, the inner connection between these three points in the story is precisely what *the readers* understand as the allegorical meaning of this text when taken together with the preceding feeding miracle and the loaves left over there.

Between the feeding of the Jews and the feeding of the Gentiles, Mark gives Jesus an extensive speech in chapter 7 on purity, meals, food and the observance of the law of Moses in confrontation with representatives of law-abiding Judaism, the Pharisees and the scribes (who are again coming up from Jerusalem). Here Mark applies the basic motifs from Jesus's speech on parables to this particular issue. Jesus's argument in 7:14ff takes the form of a parable when directed to the crowd outside; but to those inside he interprets the meaning of the parable. In order to reach the important conclusion that all food is clean (7:19; cf. Rom 14:20 and the crucial issue of common meals in Gal 2:11-14), he makes use of an anthropological duality between a man's outer and inner parts, between his body and the state of his thinking and the moral practice that results from this.

What we find here is a connection between allegory and an anthropological duality that is somehow related to what we found in Philo's "allegory of the soul", even though it certainly takes a very simplistic or "low-tech" form. Actually, in *Migr.* 89ff Philo confronts certain fellow Jews who had applied allegorical interpretation for the purpose of *neglecting* the concrete observance of the ritual practice of the law that constitutes the identity marker and borderline of the Jewish people. Against those people Philo argues that just as the body is the abode of the soul and just as the transcendent world of God's logos is stamped onto the world of sense (cf. *Migr.* 102-105), so the transcendent apprehension on the part of the *truly* allegorical reader should result in the actual practice and observance of the law. Mark, by contrast, sarcastically portrays the law-abiding Jews as being obsessed with *external* ritual activity (what ancient philosophers would define as superstition, cf. Martin 2004). It is those who belong to Jesus, the "insiders" of allegorical interpretation, who fulfil the law of Moses by their inner state of being. Here Mark is in line with Paul in Galatians. Thus, through Jesus's speech in Mark 7 the way is paved for the parallel feeding of the Gentiles in Mark 8.

Before that, however, Jesus travels far out into the periphery without any disciples. In 7:24-30 the readers meet a person of the lowest status (a Gentile woman) who is located as far out in the periphery as any other person in the narrated world; nevertheless, she personifies the highest level of understanding – even one that is close to the readers’ own hermeneutics – when she interprets Jesus’s words about bread, children and dogs as an allegory on the issue of Jews and Gentiles.

In the third and final extensive narrative about crossing the “sea” (8:14-21), the allegorical nature of the composition becomes even more obvious. Jesus summarises the meaning of the whole section by asking the disciples about the *numbers* of loaves left over in the feeding miracles. They do not (yet) understand, as Mark indicates in the very last line of the section, and no answer is given. The allegorical reader of the numbers, however, will provide the answer for himself: 5 and 12, which are “Jewish” numbers; 4 and 7, which are the numbers of universality and completion. Any reader of Philo knows that numbers play an immensely important role in his allegorical interpretation of scripture – just as the other features do that we have found in Mark’s allegorical composition: topography, geography, travels, spatial markers and personifications.

Philosophy at the roots of Christianity: Three principal issues and a conclusion

As part of the conclusion, I wish to address more directly three principal issues in the paper that I take to have important implications for the discussion of philosophy at the roots of Christianity.

a. High-tech and low-tech. I have used the term “low-tech” rather vaguely to identify Mark’s (and Paul’s) relationship with philosophy. Needless to say it will strengthen my argument if we can add precision by pointing to sources that show where and how this kind of “low-tech” reception and transformation of Platonic ideas took place. Fortunately, we can do

that. We even find it in a world of ideas that is indisputably closely related to the outlooks of Mark and Paul: that of apocalypses of the first century CE. In its account of the creation of the world, *2 Enoch* initially introduces a simplistic Platonic ontological duality between the visible and the invisible realm⁵ but eventually substitutes for that a cosmological duality between two spatially separated, material parts of the world, heaven and earth, which now becomes the framework for a vision and apprehension of the heavenly world as the true, transcendent meaning and order of the earthly world (cf. Tronier 2001).

This explains two features that I take to be core elements in Mark's and Paul's outlook in the form of a low-tech reception of key Platonic ideas in their apocalyptically framed allegorical hermeneutics. On the one hand we find a sharp *epistemological duality* between merely human knowledge, reflecting the human spirit, and a revealed, transcendent knowledge, which reflects God's spirit. On the other hand, there is a notorious absence of any explicitly reflected, sophisticated Platonic concept of the *immateriality* of the transcendent, ideal world. The original *ontological* duality in high-tech Platonic epistemology, which we find in Philo too, is in the low-tech apocalyptical reception "turned into" a *cosmological* duality between two separate material parts of the world, which now work hermeneutically as the framework for the epistemological duality.

Mark (and before him Paul) is part of this kind of apocalyptically framed reception of Platonic ideas. However, although Mark evidently adopts the basic framework of the apocalyptical world view, it is just as evident that the basic idea in his allegorical composition is more like the kind of Platonically inspired allegorical hermeneutics we find in Philo's interpretation of Abraham's migration than it is like the "wild" imagery and symbolism that we find in the

⁵ Himmelfarb 1993, 85-86, points to "some very interesting broad similarities" between *2 Enoch's* account of the first day of creation and Philo's *Opif.*: "My reading ... would offer some real basis for the standard picture: first-century Alexandria is just the place where a literate but by no means philosophically learned Jew might arrive at the blend of biblical creation and popular Platonism in the account."

genre of the apocalypses (and in the prophetic writings). The point here is only to indicate that the influence of the renaissance of Platonism that began in the first century BCE was not confined to an exclusive elite; it had a broader impact and interacted at various levels of sophistication with various traditional thought worlds. This impact is to be found already in the New Testament before it came into full flower in the high-tech kind of reception that we find in the second century.

b. Ideas and social situation. Why, then, does Mark (and Paul before him) adopt this low-tech, apocalyptically framed kind of Platonic allegorical hermeneutics? Is it simply because they were not bright enough to grasp the niceties of high-tech philosophy? Is it because their family could not afford to let them take the final step on the educational ladder? When considering these questions it is of crucial importance to keep in mind that the allegorical hermeneutics applies key philosophical ideas as an interpretative response to the social and cultural situation. This holds for Mark no less than for Philo. Thus, Mark's apocalyptically radicalised form of Platonic allegorical interpretation might not just be the result of a dull mind; while the apocalyptic outlook was no doubt of crucial importance in his tradition, it more specifically serves a special purpose in his interpretation of and response to the social and cultural situation, namely to articulate the re-evaluation of social hierarchies. Dale Martin's one-liner about the interpretative function of the apocalyptic world-view is right on target here: the apocalyptic world is "one in which the values of the Greco-Roman world are acknowledged but then turned on their heads" (Martin 1995, 60). This reminds us never to lose sight of the interaction with the historical, social, cultural and ethnic situation when we consider the level of ideas. On the other hand, it is important not to miss the formative role of the philosophical ideas and ways of thinking as a presupposition for the actual response to the social situation.

c. Philosophy and scripture. When it comes to vocabulary, narrative motifs and images, Mark's gospel is deeply rooted in the scriptural narrative world. Richard Hays' introduction

of the concepts of “echo” and *metalepsis* in Pauline studies proves equally profitable when applied to almost every section of Mark. I have argued, however, that the scriptural “echoes” in Mark are integral parts of a literary strategy through which Mark directs the reader to the allegorical meaning of the surface story. What is often neglected in intertextual literary readings between the two testaments is the need to pay attention to the hermeneutical methods, rationalities and presupposed world views that go into the New Testament authors’ actual use of the scriptural world and which contribute to generating the meaning itself of the “echo” in the first century context. *This* is where contemporary philosophy plays a crucial role. If we approach the question of philosophy at the roots of Christianity by comparing lists of vocabulary and *dogmata*, the outcome will indeed be meagre – but it will also be highly misleading. The philosophical ideas and ways of thinking inform the *way* in which the New Testament authors creatively interpreted and redefined the meaning of the biblical narrative world and ideas. The all-pervasive presence of the scriptural narrative world in Mark (and Paul) becomes almost a necessity when we recognise the importance of the Gentile-Jew issue and the ethnic component of their hermeneutical endeavours. Philosophy and scripture is not an either-or. On the contrary, allegorical hermeneutics is the place where philosophical ideas were activated hermeneutically in the interpretation of scripture for the all-important purpose of responding to the social, cultural and ethnic situation and to the various groups who also claimed to be God’s elected people and to embody the scriptural heritage. When we recognise the intimate interaction and mingling of philosophical ideas, scripture and responses to the cultural situation in the allegorical hermeneutics of Philo, Paul and Mark, it should come as no surprise that the influence of contemporary philosophy in the earliest New Testament writings takes the form of allegorical hermeneutics; for that reason ancient allegorical hermeneutics presents itself as a most promising field for the study of philosophy at the roots of Christianity.

Conclusion. If we keep the complexity of the three principal issues in mind, as well as the historically unique character of Philo's Platonic allegoresis, my reading of Mark (and Paul), which are among the earliest writings of the New Testament, leads to the conclusion that Jewish, Middle-Platonically inspired allegorical hermeneutics was the womb and birthplace of New Testament Christianity – or to put it in the metaphor used by Philo and Mark: the root from which sprang the young plant called New Testament Christianity.

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