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Mark's Jesus and the Internet

Exegetical Reflections on Authority, Identity, and
Community

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Introduction

While working on my PhD at the University of St Andrews, I was privileged to live in the coastal medieval town of St. Andrews. As a farm girl from the landlocked prairies of Canada, the excitement of living next to the North Sea never waned for me so I aimed daily during my Scottish life to “see the sea.” A quick walk through the cathedral ruins and I was at East Sands, walking the beach or the pier, gazing intently at the waves of the North Sea. Over the years, I became familiar with this small stretch of the sea. I knew how the waves would crash or swirl against the pier. I knew where and when to look for the sea glass and pottery that the waves deposited on the sand, and I wondered why razor clam shells are strewn across West Sands, but not East. I learned about the tides and got a sense of how the currents flowed. If I went too many days in the office without some time at the coast, I would start to feel a bit trapped. One quick walk along East Sands would put me back to rights.

Yet, for all the time I spent at East Sands, I know very little about the North Sea: its creatures, its shipping lanes, its ecology, its physics, its coastlines on other nations, or even its history. All I can offer is a perspective from my limited vantage point.

My relationship with East Sands is analogous to my relationship with the internet. I use it every single day for communication, research, and entertainment, and I feel unsettled whenever I do not have access to it. Yet despite my daily dependence on the internet, as I researched for this article, I was quickly overwhelmed by not only my naiveté but also the diversity, quality, and quantity of topics concerning the internet and human society. As I read articles which touched on everything from coding to religion to sociology to mental health to media theory, I found myself intrigued but completely overwhelmed. How can I, a biblical scholar whose research has focused on the Gospel of Mark, offer an intelligent, informed, and helpful addition to the emerging and established discussions about the internet?

As I researched, I noticed that in discussions of the internet and religion certain areas of concern emerge repeatedly. As Anna Neumaier comments, “a specific canon seems to have been established with regard to the possible fields of research on religion and the internet. Current research questions focus mainly on the topics of authority, community, identity, and sometimes ritual or authenticity.”¹ These topics are, of course, not new, but longstanding areas of human concern. Moreover, many are themes which run through the Bible, and thus, as a biblical scholar, I am equipped to address them.

Therefore, from my vantage point as a Markan scholar, what I offer in this article is a discussion of three currents in internet research—authority, identity, and community— which also run through Mark's presentation of Jesus and his ministry. My aim is to illustrate how biblical exegesis can inform Christian thinking and practice in the twenty-first century context in which the internet has become an integral facet of the everyday.

Method

Below, I examine in turn each of my three themes (authority, identity, and community) through a three-part discussion. First, I discuss aspects of each theme as they are presented in research on the internet and religion. In this section, I draw on the insights of established researchers, relying primarily on the respective thematic chapters in the 2012 volume *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, edited by Heidi A. Campbell, as my points of entry into the discussion of internet

1. Neumaier, “Because Faith Is a Personal Matter,” 442. For examples of research conducted along these lines, see her fn. 5.

and religion.² My purpose in this step is to introduce the broad emphases that are prevalent in these discussions and researchers' observations about Christian internet practices and mindsets.

Second, I trace how each theme is presented in the depiction of Jesus and his ministry in the Gospel of Mark. Through a narrative reading of Mark, I sketch how such features as characterization, plot, imagery, and repetition develop each theme.

Third, I offer a reflection on how the Markan development of each theme intersects with or challenges the prevalent tendencies and patterns identified by research on the internet and religion. My purpose here is not to critique research but rather to foster Christian thinking with a biblical imagination. If Christians are "people of the book," how can the Gospel of Mark shape Christian thought and praxis in a world where the internet is now a facet of everyday reality? What questions arise when our internet culture is observed through the lens of Mark's Gospel?

Authority

The Theme of Authority in Research

The topic of authority attracts persistent attention in discussions of religion and the internet. On the internet, religious authority can be manifested in different forms, depending on the context. Pauline Hope Cheong notes that it "can be vested or constructed, constituted from various perspectives referring to a range of thinking on divinely related control and influence, to exact obedience, judge, govern, and make consequential pronouncements."³ Within the broad notion of religious authority, Heidi Campbell differentiates four layers: hierarchy, structure, ideology and text.⁴

In her overview of the topic of religious authority in internet studies, Cheong observes two predominant logics in operation. First, she notes that "the dominant logic, inspired by initial studies of internet research, is that religious authority is eroded by online religious activities."⁵ With

2. In Campbell, *Digital Religion*, see Cheong, "Authority," 72–87; Lövheim, "Identity," 41–56; and Campbell, "Community," 57–71.

3. Cheong, "Authority," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 74.

4. See Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?," 1043–62; Campbell, "Religious Authority," 251–76. I am aware that in this article, I am appealing to the authority of the *text* of Mark as Christian Scripture.

5. Cheong, "Authority," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 74.

the proliferation of information and choice on the internet, traditional authorities are challenged or displaced. Instead of having to rely on traditional leaders, nonprofessionals acquire greater access to information, including “potentially oppositional information” that may weaken the credibility of the traditional religious leaders and allow “schismatic leaders to emerge.”⁶ The structure of authority is also altered with the creation of new authoritative figures such as webmasters.⁷ In sum, “religious interpretation, texts, ecclesiastical structures, and the importance of positions like webmasters and forum moderators (all framed as components of religious authority) are changed by online communication and the capabilities of the internet to expand resource access, facilitate new ritual practices, and support new positions of power.”⁸

In contrast to this dominant perspective, Cheong notes a second logic, one of continuity in which online practices relate to religious authority through “connectedness, succession, and negotiation.”⁹ According to this logic, local authorities may exercise control over online practices through surveillance or censorship, or online activity may serve to affirm the local authority.¹⁰ The role of clergy changes as well, with ministry expansion into social media and a shifting of roles from “commanders and sage to guides and mediators of knowledge” in both online and offline contexts.¹¹

In both logics, the internet alters how religious authority is perceived and received, even in offline contexts. Indeed, “the internet facilitates both the weakening and strengthening of religious authority, offering possibilities for conflict, yet also for understanding and accommodation.”¹²

The Theme of Authority in Mark

Authority is also an important issue in the Gospel of Mark, the one at the root of Jesus’s conflict with his chief opponents, the scribes.¹³ The scribes are the most prominent Jewish group in Mark. They are mentioned more

6. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 76.
7. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 78.
8. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 78.
9. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 78.
10. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 79–80.
11. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 80–81.
12. Cheong, “Authority,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 82.
13. Cf. Schams, *Jewish Scribes*, 150; Lührmann, “Pharisäer und Schriftgelehrte,” 185.

than anyone else (their name, γραμματεὺς, occurs 21 times in contrast to 12 mentions of the Pharisees and a single reference to the Sadducees), and they are portrayed “in contrast or in conflict with Jesus” more than anyone else (eighteen occasions compared with nine for the Pharisees).¹⁴ The scribes are also Jesus’s first and last human opponents (1:22; 15:31), opposing Jesus both in Galilee and in the temple and ultimately participating in his trial. The scribes thus provide the frame for Jesus’s conflict with the Jewish leadership.

The consistent point of contention between Jesus and his most consistent opponents is *authority*. The Greek word for authority, ἐξουσία, first appears in Mark in the account of Jesus’s first mighty deed, the exorcism in the Capernaum synagogue (1:22–28). Jesus is teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and Mark 1:22 sets up the contrast between Jesus and the scribes by describing the people’s reaction to Jesus: “They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having *authority*, and not as the scribes” (emphasis added).¹⁵ Jesus then casts an unclean spirit out of a man, and the crowd’s reaction is narrated again: “They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with *authority*! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him” (1:27; emphasis added).

Several aspects of this passage are pertinent to our discussion of authority. First, Jesus possesses the authority the scribes lack. This is a paradigmatic contrast that, as we shall see below, recurs in Jesus’s interactions with the scribes. Second, the crowd recognizes his authority. Third, this is an authority in word and deed. Jesus is teaching (word) and the way his authority is manifest is through liberating a man possessed by an unclean spirit (deed). His exercise of authority is therefore redemptive: it brings freedom from the bondage of possession.

Jesus’s authority is at issue again in 2:1–12, the healing of the paralytic. When Jesus pronounces the paralytic’s sins forgiven, the scribes consider Jesus’s words as blasphemy for he is presuming to do something only God can do (2:5–7). Jesus responds by prompting the paralytic to arise “so that you [the scribes] may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (2:10). Once again, Jesus’s authority is established through his words and deeds, and this time he frees the man from his sin and his paralysis.

14. Pickup, “Matthew’s and Mark’s Pharisees,” 73.

15. All Scripture citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

The next two uses of ἐξουσία further underscore Jesus's authority for not only does he possess authority, he is also the one who bestows authority to his disciples (3:15; 6:7; cf. 13:34). Thus, Mark portrays Galilean fisherman as authoritative while the scribes are not. Note again where this authority is directed: the disciples are appointed "to have authority to cast out demons" (3:15) and they are sent out with "authority over the unclean spirits" (6:7). As an extension of Jesus's ministry, the disciples also exercise his liberating authority.

Jesus's conflict with the scribes over authority culminates in Jerusalem following his action in the temple (11:15–19). Now in the company of the chief priests and the elders, the scribes question Jesus about the source of his authority (11:27–33). Jesus's response is a question: is John's baptism from heaven or from humans? (11:31), and the leaders refuse to answer and feign ignorance (11:33–34). Jesus next condemns them by telling the parable of the tenants against them (12:1–12). This final confrontation about authority highlights that Jesus's authority is divine. He is on God's side, and his unauthoritative opponents are not.

In sum, authority in Mark is God-given. Jesus is the one who teaches with authority and the one who bestows authority, especially the authority to cast out demons. Thus, authority involves word and deed, and brings about freedom and redemption.

Reflections on Authority

The Markan portrait of Jesus's authority should give pause to those who follow the first logic identified by Cheong and fear the weakening of traditional authority because of online activities. In Mark, the ones who were traditionally the authoritative ones and are threatened by Jesus's exercise of authority are the scribes. They are the ones who question Jesus's authority and who refuse to recognize it as divine. This is not to say that everyone who is concerned with maintaining authority online can be equated with Jesus's enemies, the Markan scribes, but rather it is to say that such concerns are fodder for contemplation. In Mark's Gospel, divine authority is distributed in surprising ways. Indeed, such ordinary people as Galilean fishermen were bestowed with God's authority! This narrative detail suggests that traditional Christian leaders need humility for discussing and exercising authority online because divine authority might not look as one would expect. Also, recognition and popularity cannot serve as verification

of authority. Both can be short-term and fickle responses. The crowds may have recognized Jesus's authority (1:22, 27), but by the end of Mark the crowds demand his death (15:13–14).

Moreover, the portrait of Jesus's authority challenges many conceptions of what it means to exercise authority. We noted above that Jesus's authority in teaching is revealed through his exorcisms and healings. Jesus's authority in word and deed brought about redemption and restoration. In exercising or promoting authority online, does one's deeds line up with their actions? Does the use of authority bring healing and forgiveness? Is it an authority motivated to serve (10:45)? Is it a liberating authority that welcomes people into the kingdom of God?

Identity

The Theme of Identity in Research

In her article on "Identity," Mia Lövheim notes that a central concern in studies of identity and the internet is the "relations between the offline context in which individuals live their everyday life and the ways in which they use digital media," and religion finds its place in this discussion as a "core dimension" of identity.¹⁶ As internet use rapidly increased, the focus of research shifted from discussions of disembodiment and identity expression "to how the internet is embedded in everyday life."¹⁷ It is recognized that the ubiquity of the internet no longer allows for a sharp online/offline distinction. Areas of research include identity formation through self-representation and performance online, changes in how authentic identity is understood, and the consequences of constant connected presence.¹⁸

The research on identity, religion, and the internet can be divided into three waves. The first, largely speculative wave focused on the plurality of religious options online with the potential for individuals to "pick-and-mix their religious identities," and on how the disembodied nature of online communication could permit an individual fluid and multiple religious identities.¹⁹ The second wave, in contrast to the first, brought in critical empirical studies and established the connection between online and offline

16. Lövheim, "Identity," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 41.

17. Lövheim, "Identity," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 44.

18. Lövheim, "Identity," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 44–45.

19. Lövheim, "Identity," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 45–46.

religiosity. For example, most people engaging in religious activity online were still active in offline community, and online interaction usually occurs “within already established offline social networks.”²⁰ This “integration of digital media into everyday life and existing social networks, and the convergence of media forms also meant the emergence of new individual uses of the internet for forming and representing religious identities.”²¹ The third wave then explores “religious identities online as integrated into everyday life,” picking up on such themes as how individuals participate in religious practices and narratives as producers, how “religious individuals using digital media take part in the reshaping of technology to fit their values and lifestyle,” and “how digital media enable individuals to integrate religious aspects of their identity into other spheres of everyday life and to mediate between traditional and/or culturally specific values, identities and norms, and those promoted by a neoliberal consumer culture.”²²

Religious identity online should be studied as a part of religious identity in general in contemporary culture, in which “religious identities are formed around the individual autobiography rather than geographical space or a particular religious affiliation.” Because digital media provides “a new form of social infrastructure for the individual’s religion” through the network, Lövheim concludes, “religious identity in modern society is still a social thing, deeply anchored in the social situations and relations individuals want and need to stay connected to in order to find meaning and act in everyday life.”²³

The Theme of Identity in Mark

In Mark, Jesus’s strongest statements about identity are found in the context of discipleship. After the first passion and resurrection prediction (8:27–30) and Peter’s rebuke of Jesus because his mind is “not on divine things but on human things,” Jesus explicates the cost of discipleship in a passage that emphasizes one’s life or soul (ψυχή).

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves (ἐαυτόν) and take up their cross and follow me. For those who

20. Lövheim, “Identity,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 46.

21. Lövheim, “Identity,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 48.

22. Lövheim, “Identity,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 49.

23. Lövheim, “Identity,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 52.

want to save their life (τὴν ψυχὴν) will lose it, and those who lose their life (τὴν ψυχὴν) *for my sake*, and *for the sake of the gospel*, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life (τὴν ψυχὴν)? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life (τῆς ψυχῆς)?²⁴

In this teaching, Jesus portrays self-denial as a key feature of discipleship. Rather than self-motivation, the disciple follows Jesus, losing his ψυχή for the sake of Jesus and the gospel (cf. 10:29–30). This strong statement expresses two recurrent themes in Mark: following Jesus and self-sacrifice. These two attributes are key features of the identity of a disciple in Mark and are developed elsewhere in Mark’s story, as we shall see below.

The repeated call in Jesus’s ministry is “Follow me” (1:17; 2:14; 10:21; 8:33).²⁵ Thus, Jesus places himself at the center as he proclaims the kingdom of God. The centrality of Jesus is at the fore when he appoints twelve to be his disciples. Two purposes are given: “to be with him” and “to be sent” in order to proclaim the gospel and to have authority over the unclean spirits (3:14–15). The important thing to note for the purposes of this study is that a primary aspect of apostleship is *being* with Jesus.

Following Jesus and self-sacrifice are often intertwined in Jesus’s teaching on discipleship as they are on the way to Jerusalem. In response to the disciples’ argument about who is the greatest among them, Jesus first responds with an adage about self-sacrificial discipleship: “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (9:35). Then, his words after hugging a child connect servanthood with following him: “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (9:37). Thus, 9:33–37 resonates with the concerns of 8:34–37.

A similar teaching to the disciples comes after James and John request exalted positions (10:35–40) and the other disciples take umbrage (10:41). Jesus corrects them, stating that they are not to be power-hungry like the Gentile rulers. Instead, “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and

24. Mark 8:34–37, emphasis added.

25. When Jesus rebukes Peter in 8:33 by saying, “Get behind me, Satan!” (ἄπαγε ὀπίσω μου), the language evokes Peter’s initial call in 1:17 (δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου). Jesus then explains the true nature of following him (8:34). This indicates that 8:33 should be understood as “a rebuke and a recall to adopt the correct posture of a true disciple” (Whitaker, “Rebuke or Recall?,” 673).

to give his life a ransom for many” (10:43–45). Once again, Jesus stresses servanthood and sets himself as the model of self-giving service which they are to follow. This is in essence the same message he gives the rich man whom he counsels to give up his wealth in order to help the poor and then follow Jesus (10:21).

In sum, Mark 8:34–37 offers Jesus's strongest statements on the self, characterizing the life of the disciple as one of following Jesus and of self-denial for Jesus's sake. Disciples are to be Jesus-centered and others-focused, two characteristics illustrated and affirmed elsewhere in Mark's story of Jesus.

Reflections on Identity

The way that identity is formed in contemporary society, in which the internet is embedded in everyday life, focuses on the autobiography. The self is at the center, making individual choices about self-representation and how to integrate facets of life.

Like contemporary identity, the identity of a disciple of Jesus is not defined by geography. Yet, apart from that similarity, the identity of the disciple (as delineated by Mark's Jesus) is starkly different from contemporary understandings of identity. For disciples of Jesus, it is *Jesus himself*—not one's personal autobiography—that takes center stage. The disciple is defined by following Jesus. Instead of self-representation, there is a self-denial, motivated by Jesus and the gospel, which is manifest in service. The disciple's identity is found not in herself but in relation to Jesus.

The gap between these two forms of identity—that of a disciple and the one current in online/offline society—necessitates intentionality on the part of the disciple because social media and contemporary culture foster a self-centered approach to identity formation. Intentionality and awareness is required to counteract the identity trends identified in the research. Therefore, some key questions to consider are: How can Christians engage in a culture pervaded by the internet in such a way that exemplifies servanthood? What does social media look like when the motivation is not self-gratification but is others-focused? What does it mean to follow Jesus as a self-denying servant in an online context?

Community

The Theme of Community in Research

Heidi A. Campbell's overview of community in studies of religion and the internet highlights how the "internet's ability to facilitate and mediate social relations has shifted many people's notions of friendship, relationship, and community in an age of networked, digital communities."²⁶ Whether authentic "community" is possible online is debated. Yet, the fact remains that people *are* connecting online, and that "while the space of interaction may have changed, the basic act of social exchange has not."²⁷ Campbell characterizes the study of religious community online in three waves. The first was descriptive and "helped identify the variety of expressions of religious community emerging online and reflect on how online practices could create an online version of an online faith tradition."²⁸ The second offered a critical analysis, defining the relationship of online and offline community. This wave established that, by and large, "online religious community is not a substitute, but rather a supplement to extend offline relationships and communication in unique and novel ways."²⁹ The third wave marks a more theoretical and interpretive turn, locating the study of online community within the study of life in "an information-dominated culture."³⁰ For example, research illustrates that people are involved in online community "in order to meet specific relational needs," but, because online community does not fulfill the need for embodied, face-to-face contact, they remain involved in online religious activity.³¹

In this overview, Campbell stresses that online community involvement can shape members' conception of what offline community entails. The dominant metaphor is the network, which now describes online and offline social connections: each person has a "personalized network of connections."³² Campbell explains, "Rather than operating as tightly bounded social structures, they function as loose social networks with

26. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 57.

27. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 59.

28. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 61.

29. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 62–63.

30. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 63.

31. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 63.

32. Campbell, "Community," in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 64.

varying levels of religious affiliation and commitment.”³³ Community is no longer based on geographic proximity. Rather, “the logic of the network is replacing notions of place-based community, shaping how religious community is perceived as well as how it is understood to function in the twenty-first century.”³⁴

The Theme of Community in Mark

The dominant image which governs how community is understood in the Gospel of Mark is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a central theme in Jesus's ministry and teaching. His programmatic opening sermon encapsulates the good news: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (1:15).³⁵ Repeatedly, his teaching emphasizes the kingdom of God (9:1, 47; 10:14–15, 23–35; 12:34; 14:25). The kingdom figures most prominently in his parables (4:11, 26, 30), so much so that commentators argue that even where the terminology of “kingdom of God” is absent, the concept is not. Therefore, all the parables are about the kingdom.³⁶ As we have seen in our survey of identity in Mark, Jesus's ministry in announcing the kingdom of God calls the disciples to follow Jesus and to deny themselves.

Throughout Mark, as Jesus teaches and heals, he transforms communities. For example, he eats with sinners and tax collectors, an action which elicits the scrutiny of the scribes of the Pharisees (2:15–16). He responds, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” In this case, Jesus is associating with people who are generally seen as undesirable, including them in fellowship. His explanation defines his purpose: coming to people who have need. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus repeatedly meets people's needs and brings them back into community: the cleansing of the leper (1:40–45), the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20), the raising of the dead girl and the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage (5:21–43). His compassion (6:34; 8:2) compels him to meet the hunger needs of the crowds who

33. Campbell, “Community,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 64.

34. Campbell, “Community,” in Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 68.

35. Cf. Malbon, “Markan Narrative Christology,” 187.

36. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 28; cf. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 2: “The parables of Jesus presuppose the kingdom they seek to disclose.”

flock to the wilderness to hear him (6:30–44; 8:1–10). Thus, throughout Mark, Jesus draws a community around himself and meets their needs.

Moreover, Jesus redefines family, a central human community. With his own family waiting outside, Jesus looks at “those who sat around him” and proclaims, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (3:34–35). The logic of family is now centered on the kingdom of God, and Jesus is the locus around whom this community forms. Following Jesus is of greater importance than family obligation, as illustrated in the disciples leaving everything “for [Jesus’s] sake and for the sake of the good news” (10:28–30). The family of God takes priority over the human family.

Additionally, Mark shows a weakening of geographical ties. Jesus’s ministry fails in his hometown of Nazareth (6:1–6). He is “amazed at their unbelief” (6:6). As the narrative progresses, Jesus crosses ethnic and geographic boundaries when he heals the daughter of a Syrophenician woman (7:24–30).

In sum, community in Mark is best understood through the lens of the kingdom of God. In Jesus’s ministry, people’s needs are met as he draws them into fellowship. The family is redefined as those who do God’s will.

Community in Reflection

The dominant image from the internet—the network—is so pervasive that it is altering expectations of offline community. The network consists of loose social connections with varied levels of commitment in which people engage to have their needs met.

Once again, the Gospel of Mark presents a very different picture. Instead, the governing image is the kingdom of God, in which Jesus invites people into fellowship as he meets their needs. His actions are motivated by compassion, and the commitment he requires from his disciples is total. This presents a challenge to the twenty-first century church as it disciples in an online context. How can the image of God’s reign inform our thinking and counteract some of the deficiencies inherent in the notion of the network? That is, what does it mean to approach online activity with a view to meeting the needs of others instead of constantly seeking for oneself? What does compassion look like in an online setting? How is commitment to Jesus and the gospel fostered in a world of multiple loose commitments

and connections? How can the ministry of Jesus's disciples today transform communities in online and offline environments?

Like the network, the community around Jesus is not defined by geography or familial bonds; unlike the network, however, the family of God centered around Jesus is defined by obedience to God's will. Jesus is the center and not the self or one's own interests. Thus, the community depicted in the Gospel of Mark presents a challenge to the image of community as a network.

Conclusion

As the internet increasingly becomes a central part of everyday life, our traditional notions of authority, identity, and community are challenged. The narrative of the Gospel of Mark shows Jesus and his ministry challenging the traditional notions of his day. Indeed, the Markan portrait of Jesus can still challenge our culture today. From my vantage point as a biblical scholar on the coast of the internet, I contend that Gospel of Mark presents a different view of authority, identity, and community, one which prompts us to live in a way that challenges the new status quo emerging in the online/offline reality of the twenty-first century.

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