

TANGAZA COLLEGE:

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA.

**JESUS' DISCUSSION WITH THE PHARISEES ON DIVORCE (MK 10:1-12)
AND WA-EMBU COMMUNITY.**

This is a long essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies.

By

NJUE EMILIO, O.S.B.


SUPERVISOR: FR. DOMINIC IZZO, OP.

NAIROBI.

JANUARY 2001.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION.

I, the undersigned declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

Name of Student: Njue Emilio, OSB.

Date:

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed: 

Name of Supervisor: Fr. Dominic Izzo, OP.

Date: 23/01/01

DEDICATION.

This essay is dedicated to the departed grandmother of the author (Mrs Patricia Gitiri). When she was alive, the author witnessed her handling divorce problem better than the way the present *educated* generation is doing these days. May her departed soul rest in eternal peace. This essay is also dedicated to all Wa-Embu who continue to uphold the traditional values which are in parallel with the Gospel message.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

The author wishes to thank Almighty God for giving him good health and strength during the process of producing this work. He also wishes to give thanks and appreciation to his tutor Fr. Dominic Izzo, OP for accepting to be his supervisor, for all the time and effort he spent to advice him, to guide him and to proof read this work.

The author also wishes to thank all those material and ideas he has used herein. He also wishes to thank the teaching staff of Tangaza College for their encouragement and concern while teaching different theological courses. He also wishes to thank the librarians of Tangaza for assisting him to get different reading material easily. He also wishes to thank the members of his family for provoking him to write on this topic. He also wishes to thank his cousin Bilha Wairimu for assisting him to repair his computer during the typing process.

Last but not the least, the author wishes to thank his conferees the Benedictines of Nairobi for their love, concern, encouragement and for giving him moral support during the writing of this work.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

The aim and purpose of this essay is to highlight the Markan understanding of divorce and its applicability to Wa-Embu Christians. In this millennium, divorce continues to rouse passions within the Wa-Embu. Some Wa-Embu Christians hold that, Jesus allowed divorce whereas others argue that, He did not. The author has seen that, in contemporary Wa-Embu community, there are many marriages going on in the Church. This apparently shows that the Church is growing. Nevertheless, after observing critically, he has realised that, as more Wa-Embu Christians are wed, the more they divorce. Some Wa-Embu Christians have even obtained a civil divorce, others have re-married, and others are questioning the permanence of marriage. This is causing confusion among some Wa-Embu Christians who are asking whether it is possible to achieve both fidelity in discipleship and authenticity in their marriage life. Thus divorce has become an important pastoral issue. At the same time, this question about divorce has been discussed a lot in contemporary ethics.

In order to make Jesus' instruction intelligible; the author's methodology will be descriptive, comparative, and exegetical. He will try to interpret Jesus' words within their historical context. He will avoid anachronism in order to understand Jewish and Roman teaching on divorce current in Jesus' time. The author's view shall be relegated to the concluding part.

The author aims to show the relevance and applicability of Jesus' teaching for the life of the Wa-Embu Christians today on the issue of divorce. He hopes that this essay will make an adaptation and an inculturation process a concrete reality. This is because

“today neither Wa-Embu traditions nor Christian traditions concerning marriage are observed.”¹

The author has arranged this essay into three major chapters. In the first chapter, he has treated the context and exegesis of Jesus discussion on divorce with the Pharisees. He has explained where the text lies, who were the Pharisees, the concept of divorce for both Jews and Romans of Jesus’ time. He has also interpreted the text critically verse by verse.

The second chapter deals with Mark’s theology of divorce. This is where he has explained how Mark presents Jesus, the result from exegesis as well as the meaning and importance of Jesus teaching on divorce for Mark and his community.

The third chapter deals with applicability of Jesus’ teaching for modern Wa-Embu community. It is here where he has tried to do some adaptation and inculturation. He has tried to show how Wa-Embu traditionally controlled divorce and what modern Wa-Embu Christians can learn from that tradition.

¹ Ephantus Mwaniki Josiah, Divorce among the Wa-Embu (Nairobi: Act Print Ltd., 1988), p. 23.

CHAPTER ONE.

1. THE CONTEXT AND EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS.

INTRODUCTION.

In this chapter, the author shall deal with context of Mk 10:1-12. The author will explain who were the Pharisees with whom Jesus had a discussion. To understand this discussion, he will explain the concept of divorce according to the Jews and Romans of Jesus' time. Finally, he will do exegetical analysis verse by verse.

1.1. THE CONTEXT.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' discussion with Pharisees on divorce (10:1-12) is found in the verses of central section (parallels in Mt 19:1-12 and Lk 16:18). It is between the second and third predictions of Jesus' Passion-Resurrection.

These verses are probably part of a larger pre-Markan unit (10:1-31) that deals with marriage, children, and possessions. Mark would have included these verses at this point because, just as in chapter 9, Jesus is shown teaching His disciples about the character and cost of discipleship²

Verse 1 enabled Mark to create a narrative setting for this passage. Verse 11 represents the traditional core of material on the basis of which Mark created his composite narrative. It is also the traditional kernel of Mark's narrative and it is confirmed by a Synoptic readings (cf. Mt 5:32, 19:9; Lk 16:18) and Pauline literature (1 Cor 7:11). Verses 9 and 11 give the true teaching of Jesus on divorce.³

² Dennis M. Sweetland, *Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship according to Mark*, vol. 22 (Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), p. 120.

³ Raymond F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament: Good News Studies*, vol. 38, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 102.

The discussion here revolves around the interpretation of the Scripture. The discussion about the question on divorce between Jesus and the Pharisees and its relevance of Scripture to Jewish practice is described only by Matthew (19:1-12) and Mark (10:1-12).

In Mark, this narrative has two parts: a public discourse followed by an instruction of the disciples which is one of Mark's features (cf. 4:1-9, 10-20; 7:14-15, 17-23; 9:14-27, 28-29; 10:2-9, 10-12).⁴

The Pharisees were the usual opponents and tempters of Jesus (2:16-17, 24-28; 3:1-6). Their question in this text was aimed at *testing* Him. Other tests are: the demand for a sign (8:11) and the question of whether disciples should pay taxes (12:13-17) which were challenges to Jesus' authority.

The discussion here is set in a narrative of confrontation and dispute. The teaching of Jesus in this pericope put Jesus at odds with Pharisees (10:1-9) and caused confusion among His disciples (10:10-12).

Mark's presentation of the divorce question is simple and straightforward by comparison with Matthew. The primary challenge posed by the Pharisees and scribes has been to Jesus treatment of the traditional teaching (2:1-13; 7:1-23). Jesus challenges such traditions by appealing to Scripture (7:9-13).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

1.2. EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS.

1.2.1. THE CONCEPT OF DIVORCE IN JEWISH COMMUNITY.

In the time of Jesus, the dispute was not about the right to divorce, but about what constituted valid reasons for divorce.⁵ Only the husband could dissolve the marriage. He could do this by dismissing his wife and sending her away. The only thing the wife could do was to compel her husband to dismiss her. Nevertheless, the husband was the sole agent of this dissolution. He had a direct power over his wife. The husband could only dissolve the marriage indirectly by dismissing his wife.⁶ For some rabbis, a wife could write her own certificate of dismissal; however, its validity depended totally on its bearing her husband's signature.

The legal warrant for dismissal is Dt 24:1-4. However, the warrant is there only implicitly because the passage's intent was not to establish divorce but to block the legal indecency of a man's remarrying the woman he had once dismissed. Thus, this passage presumes the prior establishment of divorce, and divorce by unilateral dismissal of the wife.⁷ In Dt 24:1, the ground for divorce is named *erwat dabar*⁸ which indicated an unacceptable behaviour in the wife.

The source of the legal warrant was that, a man was understood to take a wife whereas a woman was never said to take a husband. When a man took a wife, this was an

⁵ Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁶ Theodore Mackin, *Divorce and Remarriage* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 20-21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸ *Erwat dabar* comes from Hebrew and it may mean legal deficiency or delinquency, something indecent, uncleanness of a thing, a shameful thing, a shameful conduct, or anything physically repulsive or even displeasing.

act of establishing his ownership over her. This meant that what he took he could eventually get rid of.⁹ In Gn 2:21-23, we are told that God formed the woman from the rib of the man and gave her to Adam. “Thus, in taking Eve, Adam took back what had first been taken from him.”¹⁰ For a man to marry was therefore to acquire a new possession. According to the old Jewish Law: “If the adultery was the wife’s she violated ... her husband’s property right over her.”¹¹ The husband could only commit adultery by having intercourse with another man’s wife. Sexual intercourse with an unmarried lady was not adultery but the man violated her father’s property right, which needed punishment (Dt 22:28-29). Such a husband was forced to marry such a lady as a second wife and he could not divorce her.

The religious warrant for dismissal is Gn 1-3, which is an *etiological parable*.¹² The wife was supposed to be submissive and forever deserving of punishment whereas the husband was the master, the lord, or the wife’s punisher. Thus, divorce was taken as one of the fitting punishment a husband could levy upon a wife, a daughter of Eve who continued her ancient mother’s unfaithfulness.¹³

For dismissal, the husband had first to write out the certificate of divorce. The marriage could not be dissolved until he had both written this bill and sent his wife out of his house.

⁹ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² An *etiological parable* is a parable that seeks to account for the causal origin of misery in the history of humankind.

¹³ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

This meant that the man was blocked from acting in anger and consequently dissolving a marriage which he could later on regret. The fact too that the Law prohibited his remarrying a wife he had divorced helped to hold the man back from a precipitous decision. The Law did not fix the formulation of this writ in the time of Jesus but it may have been phrased as we find in Hos 2:4: *She is not my wife, and I am not her husband.*¹⁴

The dispute in Jesus' time about the reference of *erwat dabar* (Dt 24:1) had began with two great rabbis (Hillel and Shammai) a generation earlier. The meaning of *Erwat dabar* was their main disagreement. Hillel and his disciples interpreted *erwat dabar* broadly. Thus, a wife could be dismissed because of her moral faults and non-moral faults (i.e., anything displeasing her husband).¹⁵

The Hellelists deferred in specifying *erwat dabar*. According to Rabbi Akiba (c. AD. 135), a wife could be dismissed if she prepared meals poorly; went outdoors with head uncovered and hair in disarray, or with arms bare, or with garments torn, or if she lacked in favour or comeliness compared to other women. For Rabbi Meir (c. AD. 150), this could be eating or drinking in public, nursing the child in public, spinning cloth in public, and bathing with other men.¹⁶

Another ground could be violating a Command either of Moses or of later Jewish Law. A wife could violate a Mosaic Command by serving her husband ritually unclean food, failing to sleep apart from him during her menstrual days, failing to dispose of old leaven during Passover, or taking vows but failing to keep them. She was considered to

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

have violated a Jewish Law if she went outdoors with head uncovered or spun clothe in public. For Rabbi Abba Scha'ul (c. AD. 150), this could be discourteous and scolding treatment of her parents in-law in the present of her husband. For Rabbi Tarphon (c. AD. 100), the ground for dismissal could be discussing intimate matters with her husband at such a pitch and volume that neighbours could overhear her.¹⁷

Conduct which brought her husband into disrespect could also lead to divorce. Habitually cranky and scolding wife, lazy, refusing to perform the task proper to a wife; and failure to meet the conditions or assumptions on which the marriage was contracted (e.g., no physical defects prior to marriage) were all grounds for divorce.¹⁸

Other grounds for divorce were: refusal to eat meat, to drink wine, or to wear attractive clothing, any physical defect making a man unfit for priesthood, and body odour.¹⁹

On the other hand, Shammai and his disciples interpreted *erwat dabar* narrowly. For them, a wife could only be dismissed because of her moral fault especially in her sexual conduct (e.g., adultery).²⁰

The purpose of the bill of dismissal was to serve as the wife's proof that she was single again and therefore free to remarry. When the wife was dismissed, she had to return to her father's house, taking with her the dowry she had brought to the marriage to provide against widowhood or divorce.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

If she had children, these had to remain with the husband. However, she was allowed to take with her a nursing child with her. If the infant was a boy, she had to return him to the husband by his sixth birthday. She was free remarry any man but not a priest (Lv 21:7). However, if she had been divorced because of barrenness, there was no chance for remarriage.²¹

Some rabbis were sensitive to unfair treatment of wives, and to the cruelty that Jewish Law could work on them. If the husband was insane, he could not dismiss his wife because writing and conveying the *get pitturin*²² had to be a conscious act. Insane wife also could not be dismissed because deprived from her husband's protection, she would be vulnerable to mistreatment.²³

There were some cases when a woman had a right to demand dismissal: if the husband was unwilling or unable to support her properly, e.g., if the husband demanded against her will that she migrate from her homeland with him; if he tried to force her to take vows which she regarded as unworthy or impossible; if he continued in an occupation which made married life unbearable for her; if he transgressed the Law of Moses with her or tried to force her to transgress it; if he were habitually quarrelsome or cruel; if he were impotent; if he contracted a contagious and dangerous disease; and finally, if he developed a loathsome disease or physical defect that aroused revulsion in her, or if he refused to consummate the marriage.²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²² *Get pitturin* refers to the writ of dismissal, or the certificate of dismissal or certificate of divorce.

²³ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

The certificate of divorce was only required where both spouses were Jewish. It became prohibited for a Jewish husband to dismiss his wife against her will only by the late rabbinic enactment (c. AD. 968-1026).²⁵

1.2.2. THE CONCEPT OF DIVORCE IN ROMAN SOCIETY.

In Roman society, divorce could be caused by certain events, accidental or intentional, which were thought to destroy a marriage. Some of these are, prolonged absence of a spouse, reduction of a spouse to a slave status, captivity that separated the spouses, military enlistment on the side of the husband, and deportation in punishment for certain crimes. One or both spouses on his or her initiative could effect this. They only needed to withdraw their will to be married and to demonstrate in a recordable way the fact of this withdrawal. However, under Roman Law, there was no need of a judicial decree of a civil authority. "A contentious action in which one spouse accused the other of a fault specified by the Law was a ground for repudiation."²⁶

Among the grounds for divorce adultery was the first one and it was alleged frequently by both spouses. "The husband committed adultery only if he had intercourse with another man's wife, but a wife committed adultery if she had intercourse with any man other than her husband. Apparently, however, his bringing an unmarried women into the home he shared with his wife and having intercourse with the woman there constituted a ground for his wife's dismissing him."²⁷ Another reason for divorce was a husband forcing his wife into prostitution. The third ground was crimes or faults such as

²⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

murder, sorcery, and treason, plotting against the spouse's life, harbouring of brigands, violation of sepulchres, perjury and drunkenness were ground for divorce.

There were conditions in which the husband could dismiss his wife but she could not dismiss him if the same faults were committed to her: striking her husband; attending theatres, gladiatorial games or circuses without his permission, and dining or bathing with other men without his knowledge or permission. Before Augustus, the repudiation had been accomplished simply by the pronouncing of the formula such as, *Take your things and go or Get out.*²⁸

1.2.3. THE PHARISEES.

The word Pharisees in Hebrew is *Perrusim* and in Aramaic is *Perissayya*. It means uncertain, separated, the separate ones, separators, distinguishers or expositors. Their number was not large.²⁹

The Pharisees were the upholders of the written Law and its interpretation and they had an extensive oral tradition. They could spend a great deal of their time considering exactly how individual requirements of the Law ought to be put into practice. They upheld the divine authority of the prophetic teachings, the oral tradition of the elders (Mk 7:5), and other writings of the Old Testament.

They were in close alliance with the scribes. The representatives of the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin were all scribes. "It was the scribes of the Pharisaic tradition who passed on the religious tradition of the Jews to generation after generation of the Jewish youth,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John L. McKenzie. "The Pharisees" in Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1965), p. 668.

through the local synagogues.”³⁰ They conceived Judaism as a religion centred upon the observance of the Law, and they interpreted the obligations of the Law in the most severe manner. “The Israel under the Law which the Pharisees conceived was a theocracy...and their conception was non-political.”³¹ “The basic fault of the Pharisees was their refusal to admit that Judaism could reach any further development beyond themselves; they called a halt to the saving activity and power of God.”³²

They were a lay group and were opposed to Sadducees and to the people of the land (the ignorant who neither knew or cared about the niceties of Pharisaic observance).³³ They had little sympathy with the fanatic nationalistic who attempted to rebel against Rome, and preferred submission to Rome, which was tolerant of the religions of subject peoples and permitted or allowed the Jewish nation-state to live under its Law.³⁴

The Pharisees were extremely hostile to Jesus because He threatened their position as religious leaders (2:16-17, 24-28; 3:1-6; 7:1 ff.). They plotted against His life (3:6). They tried to trap or to test Him (8:11; 12:13-17) and proposed questions about the interpretation of the Law (Mt 22:34-40).³⁵ Jesus cautioned His disciples about their leaven (8:15) and called them a wicked and adulterous generation (7:1 ff.).

³⁰ Eileen Welch and Bernard Sharkey. The Fulfilment (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 24.

³¹ McKenzie, op. cit., p. 668.

³² Ibid., p. 669.

³³ Ibid., p. 668

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 669.

They sought the will of God with great seriousness but were too concerned with external behaviour and avoidance of all that they considered to be *unclean* to accept the radical approaches of Jesus in His teaching about the Kingdom of God.³⁶ When Jesus associated with the Publicans and sinners and healed on Sabbath, and neglected the ritual ablutions, they were scandalised (2:16-17, 24-28; 3:1-6; 7:1-6). Jesus condemned their exclusiveness as harsh (2:13-170, and their rigor in the Law as intolerable (2:24 ff.) For Jesus, the Pharisees' rigor in the Law was a device to evade its obligations (Mt 15 1 ff; Mk 7:1 ff.).³⁷

Since they believed in the existence of the demons, they accused Jesus of being under the influence of Beelzebul (3:22,30), thus committing the unforgivable sin against the Spirit (3:28 ff.).³⁸

Not all of the Pharisees deserve condemnation since we have people like Nicodemus who believed in Jesus (Jn 3:45-45), the Christian community in Jerusalem which included a large number of Pharisees (Ac 15:5), and Paul was a Pharisee (Ac 23:6-9; 26:5).

1.2.4. EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS VERSE BY VERSE.

1. HE SET FROM THERE AND WENT INTO THE DISTRICT OF JUDEA (AND) ACROSS JORDAN.

This verse is the narrative introduction. It follows the second passion prediction unit (9:30-50). The crowd represented Galilean pilgrims since some commentators speculate

³⁶ Welch and Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁷ McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 669.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

that Mark might have had in mind the route to Jerusalem taken by Galilean pilgrims, who would travel along the Jordan in order to avoid Samaria.³⁹ The crowd formed a background from which individuals emerge to play their roles in the teaching process. Jesus was teaching the true meaning of discipleship.⁴⁰ If one has to take the entire Markan Gospel, Jesus was on His way to be crucified in Jerusalem. Mark's geographical reference is vague: thus beyond the Jordan most likely was Mark code for a foreign region.⁴¹

2. IS IT LAWFUL FOR A HUSBAND TO DIVORCE HIS WIFE?

This verse depends on 2:24,26; 3:4; 6:18; and 12:4 and it enjoys a legal connotation. It deals with a matter relative to divorce, from the perspective of the husband.⁴² To *test* (peirazo) Him meant that, they had come to show their cunning. Perhaps the Pharisees had heard from others that Jesus took a stand disagreeing with the Law in the matter of Jewish husbands dismissing their wives.⁴³ It is suggested that the question here was asked by Jews who already knew of Jesus' radical attitude towards the Law and hoped to *trap* Him into some outright contradiction of it.

For a Pharisee, Dt 24:1-4 made clear beyond doubt that divorce was lawful in certain circumstances. The only question he could raise was about what those circumstances were. The Scripture stipulated the conditions that must be fulfilled in order

³⁹ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Lamar Williamson, JR. Mark: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983), p. 174.

⁴¹ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴³ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

that a man licitly divorces his wife in Dt 24:1-4. Thus, for Pharisees who were very well versed in the Scripture, this question was inappropriate unless they wanted a direct confrontation with a teaching of Jesus which they already knew.⁴⁴ The Pharisees knew that Jesus' prohibition of divorce conflicted with the assumption behind Dt 24:1-4.

The intention of this question was to try to bring Jesus to the point of contradicting Moses or the Law⁴⁵ or make Him a suspect in the eyes of Herod Antipas, the client king who had married his brother's wife (6:14-29).⁴⁶ If the Pharisees were able to show that Jesus contradicted Moses, they could discredit Him in the eyes of the people, who had already accepted Him as a *Teacher* who unlike the Pharisees, taught new things with power and authority (9:27).⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Jesus did not contradict Moses. "The Pharisees *test* is an attempt to trap Jesus into taking the position of one Religious party, thereby alienating the others."⁴⁸

As mentioned above, in the time of Jesus there were two schools who disagreed on the interpretation of Deut 24:1. The School of Rabbi Beth Hillel the Elder ruled that a man might divorce his wife for any reason which caused him displeasure. The School of Rabbi Beth Shammai ruled that a wife could be divorced only because she had committed adultery.

⁴⁴ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, vol. 2, ed. by John L. McKenzie (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1971), pp. 135-136.

⁴⁶ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ JR, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

3. *WHAT DID MOSES COMMAND YOU?*

Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' question at once.⁴⁹ The supposition in Jesus' choice of verb here must have irritated the Pharisees because it challenged a supposition of their own.⁵⁰ Jesus asked them what God intended in creation. His counter question raised the discussion to the level of a consideration of the divine Law. "God's Commandments were oriented towards the well-being of His people. Jesus' counter question suggests that He (and His disciples) had a different attitude towards divorce from that entertained by the Pharisees."⁵¹

Jesus refused the grounds for the original question asked by the Pharisees. Thus, He could not have been accused of breaking the Law because His views coincided with those of teachers who were stricter in their interpretation.⁵²

4. *MOSES PERMITTED HIM TO WRITE A BILL OF DIVORCE AND DISMISS HER.*

The Pharisees were reacting to Jesus' challenge in verse 3. They are teachers in this case and were trained to what was specifically legislated or commanded. Therefore, in obedience to Gn 1:28, they readily dismissed wives who were barren, or with whom they could not subdue the earth.⁵³ The Pharisees claimed to have knowledge of the Mosaic Law when Jesus demanded that they tell Him what the Law says. They responded with reference to Dt 24:4. They corrected Jesus by insisting that Moses did not *command* them

⁴⁹ Edward Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark*, trans. by Donald H. Madvig (London: S.P.C.K., 1971), p. 202.

⁵⁰ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁵¹ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁵² PHEME PERKINS, "The Gospel according to Mark" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon press, 1995), p. 617.

⁵³ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

but *permitted* a man to write a bill of divorce and dismiss his wife. They had softened Jesus' phrase *command* to *permit*. Thus, they moved the discussion from a consideration of what God had commanded through Moses to something that was merely permissible.⁵⁴

"Dt 24:1 was apparently an old divorce Law taken over by the Deuteronomist. In its immediate context within Deuteronomy (Dt 24:1-4) the prescription served as a Law of purity, banning the abomination of the remarriage of a divorced and subsequently remarried woman to her first husband."⁵⁵ Within its broader biblical context (Dt 24:1-22), this text served as a social statute to protect the woman. A man had to think twice about divorcing his wife. Dt 24:1-4 takes marriage as institution for granted: "It concerns when the husband had decided to divorce his wife, and the prohibition of remarriage after her second marriage has ended."⁵⁶

In ancient Judaism, divorce was not a public legal action in a court. The husband simply wrote out a writ and presented it to his wife. But there was no provision in the Law (Dt 24:1-4) for a woman to divorce her husband. Nowhere in the written Torah was the permission of divorce explicitly spelled out.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Daniel J. Harrington, "The Gospel according to Mark," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. by Raymond E Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1994), p. 617.

⁵⁷ McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

5. *BECAUSE OF THE HARDNESS OF YOUR HEARTS HE WROTE YOU THIS COMMANDMENT.*

Hardness of heart occurs also in 2:24-3:5, whereby Jesus was challenging the Pharisees' interpretation of what was lawful on the Sabbath. They did not question the intent behind the Law for they had no compassion. It also occurs in 4:10 ff.; 4:40; 6:45-52; 7:18; 8:14-21 and 9:17 where Jesus complained about lack of understanding of His disciples.

Hardness of heart "Has to do with a lack of insight in making judgement. It implies a lack of understanding and perception... and it is associated with fear and lack of trust. It makes a person legalistic and judgmental, emphasising religious laws above the dignity of human beings. A person afflicted with 'hardness of heart' is without the insight that leads to compassion."⁵⁸

By speaking of hardness of heart, Jesus was referring to the corrupt state of creation which led to sin and suffering. This verse is a prophetic interpretation proportioned to a significant moment in the history of Israel (Ezk 20:25). The implication of Jesus here was that, the accepted practice of getting rid of unwanted wives was a continuation of Jews' spirit of unfaithfulness, and because of it the people were given a Law that was not good.⁵⁹

Jesus opposed substituting human traditions for the commandment of God (7:9-13). His reply was clear and unequivocal. He answered the Pharisees by identifying first the reason for which the Law allowed divorce, but they did not expect to hear what He said. "Their hardness of heart drew Moses' command to dismiss their wives. Were they not

⁵⁸ Ardy Bass, "Jesus and Divorce," *The Bible Today* Vol. 32, No. 6 (November, 1994): p. 360.

⁵⁹ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

thus stubborn they would have received neither command nor permission.”⁶⁰ For Jesus, Moses permission was a man-made tradition in violation of the Commandment of God. For Jesus, Moses command clashes with what God had commanded from the beginning of creation. Jesus challenged them by telling them, “It is Moses’ command to go on and disobey God’s will in a way that their forefathers had already stubbornly decided to do.”⁶¹

According to Jesus, institutions are made for a human being and not a human being for institutions. He told them that, the procedure by which a husband might divorce his wife resulted from the hardness of the heart of humanity. Thus, Jesus criticised the Law which allowed divorce as He had done in 2:23-3:5 about too rigid interpretation of the Sabbath Law. For Him, Dt 24:1-4 was not the original plan of God. For Jesus, the Pharisees were only interested in preserving the Law, as they understood it, not in doing God's will.

Jesus did not directly condemn divorce. He challenged the Pharisees to consider why Moses allowed divorce. Jesus wanted them to look for underlying cause.⁶² Jesus was looking at the selfish individualism of the Herodian court when He made His comments in answer to the Pharisees' question (6:14-29). Jesus wished to insist that God’s will for human beings, set forth in the Decalogue, took priority over other provisions of the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶² Bass. op. cit., p. 359.

Mosaic Law.⁶³ “Moses cannot be said to contradict God’s plan, for Moses’ decision about divorce was governed, not by God’s plan but by man’s hard-heartedness.”⁶⁴

6. BUT FROM THE BEGINNING OF CREATION, GOD MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE.

This is a creation poem (Gn 1:27). Jesus pushed His counter challenge back beyond Moses to God’s will itself. When Jesus said: *From the beginning*, this suggested to the Pharisees that, their interpretation of the husband-wife relationship was not what God had originally intended, and that their interpretation was an innovation that contravened God’s will for marriage.⁶⁵

God intended men and women to be permanently joined in marriage, so no human tradition could claim the authority to override that fact. The Pharisees had substituted human tradition for God's intention. The text of Gn 1:27 focused upon the creation of one man and one woman not God’s creation of sexual distinction. Jesus did something more than answer their question about divorce, because He drew their attention to an even more important question: *What kind of marriage did God intend to have?*⁶⁶

Jesus' intention was not to create a new legislation. His main purpose was to go beyond the Law and replace it with a new commandment from God. For Jesus, the Law is very clear because it is contained in the very act of creation of male and female not in the Mosaic instructions.

⁶³ Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 645.

⁶⁴ John J. Kilgallen, *A Brief Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 188.

⁶⁵ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁶ John Hargreaves, *A Guide to St. Mark’s Gospel* (London: S.P.C.K., 1979), p. 158.

7. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER (AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE).

“In the Bible, the introductory phrase... which in Mark joins Gn 2:24 to Gn 1:27 links Gn 2:24 to the epithalamium, the bridal song which immediately precedes it...(Gn 2:23-24).”⁶⁷ The Pharisees had overlooked the Garden Parable in Gn 2:24, thus Jesus quoted this.

The two verbs in the command belong to the language of covenant. They say first that a man shall ‘abandon’ his father and mother.... He does so in order to enter a new covenant. He joins her; he cleaves to her To be husband and wife a man and a woman enter and live a convenantal commitment to one another.⁶⁸

The forsaking of the house of one's father was more meaningful at that time, since a man would forsake the solidarity and protection of his own clan. To the present day, this forsaking is the proper necessity for matrimony. According to Gn 2:18, God brought the woman into existence because of man's need.

8. THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

In the Genesis 2, the bridal song offers an etiological motivation for sexual attraction, hence, the ‘therefore’ of verse 24. Mark did not refer primarily to sexual attraction. Rather, he used Gn 2:24 to highlight the idea that only two had become one according to the divine ordinance.⁶⁹ One flesh designates a person's nature in its mortality and frailty as well as a person's identity. Hence, man and woman became one person in the Law and before the people. Becoming one flesh implied a covenant bond

⁶⁷ Collins, *op. cit.*, p.97.

⁶⁸ Mackin, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53

⁶⁹ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

between persons far transcending physical union. It also meant they would be joined forever in body, mind and spirit.

Flesh can mean not only one component of the body, but in a certain context, it means *flesh-weakness*. Bone can have the meaning of strength and power. Flesh-weakness and bone-strength are antitheses in combination, and the antitheses include not only the two extremes but also all degrees between them. This means that they include the full range of a person's character traits, from his or her weakest to his or her strength. One flesh is an expression of the physical-sexual union that brings a man and a woman together in marital union, a physical union which encompasses a personal link. Therefore, when Adam said Eve is his bone and flesh (Gn 2:23), he meant that she was to share his strength and his weakness and all that lay between.⁷⁰ Married couple constitute one flesh and therefore, their relationship can not be dissolved. Reverse side is prohibition of divorce and re-marriage. Divorce would be like trying to divide one person into two.

For Jesus, man and woman in marriage could only be regarded as one. Therefore, unity is an essential property of marriage. In indicating that marriage is a sacramental union, Jesus removed the idea of the subordination of the woman to the man. Husband and wife were partners, each equally responsible for preserving the lifelong union which was God's will for them.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Mackin. *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁷¹ Welch and Bernard. *op. cit.*, p. 214.

We can get at least two implications of Jesus: “if a man would not think of ruining the less precious relationship with his parents, how then could he think of ruining the more precious relationship with his wife. And if in marrying a man becomes *one body* with his wife, one person in the Law and before the people, how could he get rid of his own person?”⁷²

9. THEREFORE WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER NO HUMAN BEING MUST SEPARATE.

This verse was Jesus’ conclusion of Scriptural argumentation and it dealt with Mosaic Law (Dt 24:1). Jesus in this verse gave His own *halakha*.⁷³ It was a sapiential warning and it also provided an answer to the question raised in verse 2.

Jesus invalidated the Old Testament procedure. Jesus was telling the Pharisees that, husband was not the lord of the marriage but God; and that it was not the husband’s will that kept him and his wife together but God’s will. The idea of this unity was not foreign to late Judaism. Tob 8:6 is quoted to have said that: *You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support.* Thus, “From this Jewish perspective, the separation of those who are united in a divinely ordained union would contravene the will of God.”⁷⁴ The teaching of Jesus up to this verse had not been clearly understood. This would be presented again for the Twelve in verses 11-12.

Some Christians say that Jesus in this verse taught that divorce is never right whereas other say that He taught it is right. Those who say it is right use the following arguments.

⁷² Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷³ *Halakha* is an apodictic law or a command that says exactly what must be done or must not be done.

⁷⁴ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

First, Jesus' words were an answer to the Pharisees only and not intended to be a rule for all Christians. Secondly, although divorce is against God's plan and must be firmly avoided by Christians, there may be very occasional times when it is allowed. They quote Mt 19:9 where Jesus is reported to have said that a man can divorce his wife if she had committed adultery.⁷⁵

Since God created the marital union, whoever separates those joined together undoes what God has done and stands in opposition to God's action. Whoever accomplishes the action which is contrary to God's own action is a contrary person. She or he is hard of heart.⁷⁶

Jesus in this verse showed that indissolubility is an essential property of marriage. Jesus' conclusion here was not meant as an absolute prohibition upon divorce which would both overturn the Mosaic statute and return to a legalistic solution.⁷⁷

10. IN THE HOUSE THE DISCIPLES AGAIN QUESTIONED ABOUT THIS.

In contrast to the Pharisees who had posed a hostile question to Jesus, the disciples of Jesus petitioned their Master to give them further instruction. Unlike earlier sections in Mark's Gospel where Jesus' disciples are portrayed as lacking in understanding (4:10; 4:40; 7:18-19; 8:17 ff.; 9:17 ff.; 9:19), their lack of understanding with regard to this specific issue is clearly dispelled by their open question.

⁷⁵ Hargreaves, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁷⁶ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁷⁷ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 265.

The framework of private instruction was the occasion for plain teaching about divorce and re-marriage. This was meant for the Twelve only.

The whole matter had been explained, but a human being can not understand God's revelation. Although the principle should have been adequate for them, it was still necessary to spell out the ethical implications. This had to do with the ever important issue of the faithfulness of spouses in the marriage relationship.⁷⁸

11. WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE AND MARRIES ANOTHER, COMMITS ADULTERY AGAINST HER.

This verse addresses the issue of divorce from the perspective of the husband and its legal consequences.⁷⁹ This referred to divorcing the first wife. "In practice, divorce often takes place precisely because a husband desires to marry another woman."⁸⁰ This verse is similar to Luke 16:18a. Jewish Law prohibited re-marrying between two divorced persons if the wife had been married to and divorced from another man in the interim. Here, Jesus showed what the Law did not, that a man who divorced his wife to marry another woman, wronged his wife. To divorce ones wife is a sin, but it is not necessarily adultery.

"The late Jewish tradition considered the 6th Commandment to be one which required a husband's fidelity to his wife."⁸¹ Other teachers allowed men to divorce their wives in certain circumstances, but Mark's Jesus did not. "The context (Dt 24:1-4) shows that the

⁷⁸ Philip Van Linden. The Gospel according to Mark: Collegeville Bible Commentary. vol. 2 (Minnesota: Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1983), p. 54.

⁷⁹ Collins, op. cit., p. 79.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 100.

issue here is not the lawfulness of divorce but the problem of the man's defilement should he marry his first wife after she has remarried and divorced."⁸² According to Jesus, in spite of her bill of divorce, a woman still belonged to her first husband and therefore she was not free to re-marry.

12. IF SHE DIVORCES HER HUSBAND AND MARRIES ANOTHER, SHE COMMITS ADULTERY.

According to Collins, this verse is a secondary addition to the traditional saying reflected in verse 11.

From the historical point of view, the divorce of a husband by a wife was not generally possible within the Palestinian context in which the narrator has placed his account. From the standpoint of narrative composition, it is only verse 11 which responds to the initial question of verse 3. Any additional material must be considered to be further commentary.... From the Synoptic point of view, the logion is without parallel in the Matthean and Lukan accounts of Jesus' teaching on divorce.... It is a later redactional addition to the traditional logion contained in verse 11.⁸³

For the Jews, adultery signified sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband. Thus this verse was taken as an adaptation of Jesus teaching to conditions in which Roman Law which allowed women to initiate divorce proceeding and re-marriage prevailed. Since Mark's readers were a community in Rome, he felt free to revise Jesus' words and interpolate them.⁸⁴

This verse fits the story of Herod Antipas' second marriage, since his sister-in-law had to divorce her husband in order to marry him (6:14-29).⁸⁵

Mark's version of John the Baptist execution has made it clear that the royal court was sensitive to prophetic criticism of the fact that Herod Antipas had divorced his wife in order to marry his brother's former wife [6:17-19]. The connection between the execution

⁸² Bass, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

⁸³ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 644.

of John the Baptist and ... question put to Jesus [by Pharisees] would be even stronger if the geographical notice in verse 1 refers to Herod Antipas' other territory, Perea.⁸⁶

Jesus sided with John the Baptist's dangerous view of the marriage between Antipas and Herodias. However, He avoided taking sides on the hidden question about Herod Antipas' marriage to his sister-in-law and stacked with what concerned His disciples. This verse does not stipulate what the injured party should do once his or her spouse has remarried unlike Jewish Law.

⁸⁶ ibid., p. 643.

CHAPTER TWO.

2. MARK'S THEOLOGY OF DIVORCE.

INTRODUCTION.

In order to understand Mark's theology of divorce, it is necessary to understand how Mark presents Jesus in this pericope. In this chapter, the author will show what he has drawn out from the exegesis. This shall be followed by the meaning and importance of Jesus' teaching for Mark and his community.

2.1. HOW MARK REPRESENTS JESUS IN THIS PERICOPE.

A question or a statement by Jesus' disciples provides an occasion for His further instruction (cf. 1:37 ff; 4:10; 5:31; 6:35-36; 7:17; 8:4; 9:28; 10:26; 13:3; 14:12, 10:10). For Mark, Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees is an object lesson for His disciples.⁸⁷ Their question is but a foil for the instruction on divorce which He is about to give.⁸⁸

Mark uses his favourite verb *eperotao* (i.e., to ask) 25 times whereas the other New Testament authors combined use it only 28 times.⁸⁹ His predilection for this verb is due to the literary demands of his Gospel as well as to his characterisation of Jesus as a Teacher.⁹⁰ Jesus' disciples sometimes use this designation in addressing Him in situations that have nothing to do with such activity on His part (9:38; 10:35).⁹¹

⁸⁷ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.

⁹¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Proclamation Commentaries: Mark*, ed. by Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 61.

Mark emphasises Jesus' role as a Teacher by the use of his favourite adverb *palin* (again) in verses 1 and 10 and he frequently calls Him Teacher. This adverb underscores the fact that Jesus customary teaches the people (10:1). For Mark, Jesus is a Teacher, and Him alone is teaching.⁹²

The role of Jesus as Teacher of His disciples is particularly highlighted in Mk 8:27-10:45.... Within this context. Jesus is persistently identified by His role as a Teacher, as one who fulfils the teaching function in striking fashion. ... The aura of Jesus the Teacher pervades the entire narrative even if Jesus is not explicitly called Teacher, either by the Pharisees in Mk 10:2-9 or by His disciples in Mk 10:10-12.⁹³

Jesus is a Teacher, one who teaches (9:33 ff.) an extraordinary Jewish Teacher who teaches with authority and who teaches new things (1:22, 27).⁹⁴ Both friends and enemy call Him Teacher (4:38; 9:17; 9:38; 12:18-19; 13:1). He teaches in the Synagogue (1: 21; 6:2), in the Temple (11:17; 12:35; 14:49) and He teaches as He moves about (6:6-7;). He teaches the crowd (2:13; 4:1-2; 6:34). Mark assures us that whenever such crowds gathered, it is Jesus' custom to teach them (10:1).

"Mark identifies Jesus as Teacher where one would not have expected it. For example, Mark regularly uses the title, or the verb, in connection with miracles of Jesus (4:38; 5:35; 9:17; 9:38; 11:21)."⁹⁵ Jesus designates *Teacher* as the title by which He wants His disciples to identify Him to a man in a village (14:14), and identifies His daily activity as teaching (14:49). Thus the Pharisees come to find out whether He is an authentic Teacher (10:2-10) like Moses. Jesus also teaches the disciples privately (4:10-

⁹² Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹⁴ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

20, 34; 9:28-30; 13:3-8). The Scribes are ready to destroy Him because of His teaching (11:18).

2.2. THE RESULTS FROM THE EXEGESIS.

The complementary saying of Jesus (v. 12) was developed within a Hellenistic-Christian milieu, as well as the conflict story itself (vv. 2-9).⁹⁶ Verses 11-12 reinforce the point of verses 2-9: they neither legislate nor warn, they merely state. These two verses reflect what Jesus would have said if He had to address Christians living under Roman Law. "Although verses 11-12 make the same point as verses. 2-9, in effect they extend the teaching of Jesus beyond its original Jewish setting into the wider Greco-Roman world.... These verses show that as the early Christian community encountered the Roman legal situation, it adapted this saying about marriage in order to preserve its original intention."⁹⁷ Mark portrays Jesus as one who is well conversant with the Greek Bible and able to build upon a Scriptural argumentation on the basis of that Greek Bible. Jesus has the allure of a Hellenistic Rabbi, rather than a Palestinian one. This is an indication that the Scriptural apologetic of Mk 10:2-9 is formulated in a Hellenistic rather than in a Palestinian context.⁹⁸

... Jesus answer to the Pharisees was an actual answer He gave to a problem of His society, whereas Jesus' answer to His disciples ... was not something explicitly said by Jesus, but something which Roman Christians deduced from what He did say in Palestine; they deduced it to meet a need arising from their own Law code... a need Jesus never had to face and thus never explicitly addressed.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁹⁷ Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁹⁸ Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

⁹⁹ Kilgallen, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

Since Jesus does not so much appeal to specific texts of the Torah but bases His teaching upon real life situation, it is likely that the Scriptural reflection found in Mark emanates from the early Church rather than from Jesus Himself.

“The conflict story offers a rationale for Jesus’ prophetic warning against divorce by appealing to the will of God as expressed in the creation of man and woman.... Jesus’ teaching on this matter creates a social division between ‘us’, that is Jesus and his disciples, and ‘you’ that is those who take issue with the Christian position, represented in the Markan narrative by the Pharisees, the traditional opponents of Christians and their way of life.”¹⁰⁰

"The Pharisees question is not related to the Shammai-Hillel controversy on the interpretation of the text of Dt 24:1-4. It concerns simply divorce as such."¹⁰¹ About divorcing a wife for any cause (Mt 19:3), this is a question that could plausibly be raised in a Palestinian Jewish milieu, but not whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls has nevertheless prompted some nuancing of the common assumption that Matthew reflects a more Jewish setting than Mark. The assumption was that the first-century Judaism was predominantly Judaism of a Pharisaic sort.¹⁰² However, Mark’s version of the question is more likely accurate than that of Matthew.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁰¹ Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel according to Mark* (New York: William H. Sadler, Inc., 1983), p. 154.

¹⁰² Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹⁰³ Mackin, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

There is no direct evidence as to the original form of the question. This fact should be born in mind when the passage is being used as a basis for deciding current questions about divorce. Jesus transfers the whole discussion from the realm of what *is lawful* into the higher realm of the purpose of God, and the moral and spiritual realities of the marriage relationship. By doing so, Jesus has laid the profound emphasis on the indissolubility and sanctity of marriage. For Christians His words are regulative, but in particular cases they need to be interpreted under the guidance of the Spirit (Jn 14:13).

It can not be assumed that the question is settled by simply quoting His words; for the record is limited to His reply to a hostile question and to detached sayings in Mk 10: 11 ff., Mt 5:32, and Lk 16:18). Moreover, the trend of His teaching is against legalism.¹⁰⁴

Mark has only simple prohibition with no restrictive clause as the one we find in Mt 19:9 (i.e., except for unchastity). The adultery clause of Mt 5:32; 19:9 can not nullify or relax Jesus' fundamental and universal prohibition of divorce. His purpose is to go beyond the Law and replace it with a new Commandment from God. "If Jesus accepted adultery as an exception, He would have been going scarcely any further than Shammai."¹⁰⁵ It is more likely that Jesus simply declares the basic principle. This Christian ideal is indissoluble, lifelong and exclusive fidelity.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, this exceptional clause is absent in Luke and in Mark.

¹⁰⁴ Vincent Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark (London: Macmillan, 1957), p. 421.

¹⁰⁵ Schnackenburg, op. cit., p. 138.

¹⁰⁶ C.F.D Moule, The Gospel according to Mark: The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999), p. 77.

"Given both the ease of divorce and the evidence that Jewish women also divorced their husbands the variant probably reflects a scribe's attempt to fix Mark's text so that it matches the initial question, not an earlier, more Jewish, reading."¹⁰⁷ St. Paul has also quoted a similarly adapted form of Jesus' saying (1 Co 7:10).

Mark is closer to the original intention of the Old Testament regulation, which gives some measure of protection to the divorced wife, because the certificate preserves her honour and freedom of action. Jesus saying is a powerful, prophetic condemnation of a social psychology and patriarchal mind-set that leads to the abuse of marriage. It is powerful since it condemns the inner heart which desires, plans, and produces the action, not simply prohibiting a single action. This saying is a prophetic proclamation of women's right¹⁰⁸ and it shows Jesus as a champion of women. "What Jesus prophetically condemns is not divorce but the patriarch mind-set which leads support to any easy repudiation of one's wife."¹⁰⁹

"By citing passages from Genesis, Jesus appears to have bested the Pharisees in the *debates* by referring to the order of creation, whose Scriptural referents must be interpreted according to their plain meaning regardless of any interpretation which might be brought to bear upon Dt 24:1."¹¹⁰ Jesus refers twice to the *commandment* while the Pharisees refer twice to the matter of permission. Therefore, Jesus is concerned about the will of God while the Pharisees are concerned about their own rights. "Almost all

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 645.

¹⁰⁸ Seing Ai Yang, "Jesus Saying on Divorce: A Korean perspective." *The Bible Today* Vol. 35 No. 1 (Jan. 1997): p. 54.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹¹⁰ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

contemporary exegetes and theologians perceive that Jesus seeks to restore marriage to the original form God intended it to have."¹¹¹ The view that marriage was ordained by God is not just some ideal, nor is it something to be overcome in the interest of platonic love. This is something given by nature that we must accept without sentimentality or scorn.¹¹²

Jesus removes marriage from the realm of Law by treating it as grounded in God's creative love. He fights all His life against crowding the spiritual into statutory regulations, hence, He has not established another legalism. The persistence with which He changes the question of what is permissible into the question of what God wills shows a fundamental victory over legalism. "Jesus did not write a new Code; He simply recalled the original plan of God."¹¹³ Jesus quotes Gn 1:27; 2:24 to support Himself. Therefore, instead of setting his own individual authority over the Law of Moses, He sets over it, the purpose of God in creation and the divine ordaining of marriage. "Hardly any other statement has been handed down to us in the New Testament in so many different ways as Jesus' statement about the impossibility of divorce. This shows that the Church from the very beginning understood Jesus' words not as a kind of article of the Law, but as prophetic and Messianic words."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Harrington, Gospel according to Mark, op. cit., p. 152.

¹¹² Schweizer, op. cit., p. 203.

¹¹³ Fernando Armellini, Celebrating the Word: Commentary on the Readings, yr. B (Paulines: Nairobi: 1993), p. 298.

¹¹⁴ Walter Kasper, The Theology of Christian Marriage (London: Burns and Oates, Ltd., 1980), p. 51.

Jesus gives a religious reason for His limitation of the practice of divorce which was both socially and religiously acceptable.¹¹⁵ Jesus is not telling a battered woman that she and her children must risk physical and psychological torment every day just to avoid divorce. He is looking at the selfish individualism of the Herodian court when He makes His comments in answer to the Pharisees' question. Jesus prohibits divorce under the assumption that the marriage involved is a real marriage. In divorcing and re-marriage, a person commits a double sin. Jesus gives marriage a spiritual significance which the rabbis had ignored. Marriage for Him is not merely a social arrangement to cater for man's physical needs. Hence, He gives marriage a position of highest dignity.

Monogamy is implied in Jesus' answer albeit indirectly. Jesus never actually said: 'You shall not marry two wives' because this was unnecessary. At the time He was teaching the Jews who no longer practised polygamy, as in the days of Abraham.¹¹⁶ Thus, what is regarded as God's will is where two sexes become one flesh refers to a stable monogamous marriage.

We have to be cautious about making wide-ranging claims concerning divorce in the modern world based on Mark. To come to a conclusion about Jesus teaching on divorce, we have to treat also other New Testament texts which deal with divorce. We have also to address the position of some scholars that if Mark is read as legislation it would go against the trend of the teaching of Jesus as a whole which is against legalism. Mark does not mention the degrees of indissolubility, the nature of sacramentality, or the

¹¹⁵ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹¹⁶ Hargreaves, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

effect of consummation. Thus, these verses express the absolute will of God, but do not discuss what is to be done if our human sinfulness persists.

2.3. THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF JESUS' TEACHING ON DIVORCE FOR MARK AND HIS COMMUNITY.

Mark's readers know that the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus ministry does not belong to hard-hearted, faithless generation with which Jesus constantly has to contend (cf. 9:19). "The teaching of Moses is not for Christians, for God's Kingdom has come and, we, its members follow God's plan at creation, not the Law in Deuteronomy."¹¹⁷ "With the coming of Jesus things must be restored to their original condition, since the Kingdom which He teaches is the restoration of the original will and plan of God for man."¹¹⁸ They have to understand the words of Jesus spiritually not legally. Mark's leaders also know that the Pharisees are intent on destroying Jesus (3:1-6; 8:15).

The would be Christians in the sexually permissive Roman society are being told that the cost of discipleship includes adopting a new sexual ethics, one which goes against the accepted values of the wider society.¹¹⁹ Mark's perspective is that of the stance to be taken by Jesus' Hellenistic disciples vis-à-vis the prescriptions of Jewish Law on divorce.

In this pericope, Jesus is claiming to know the mind of God and the Scriptures better than anyone else does. Thus, for Mark and his community, this presents a teaching which is difficult to comprehend which is a *cross carrying* (cf. 8:34 ff).

¹¹⁷ Hargreaves, *op cit.*, p. 159.

¹¹⁸ Sean Freyne and Henry Wansbrough, *Mark and Matthew: Scripture Discussion Commentary*, no. 7, ed. by Laurence Bright (Illinois: ACTA Foundation, 1971), p. 93.

¹¹⁹ Sweetland, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

Mark's Jesus will challenge some people to continue to be faithful forever and others whom He will challenge to accept to the needs and feelings of those who no longer can live with their spouses.¹²⁰ No one should marry except with the intention of living with the same partner for life. "The contrast between the Christian position and that attributed to Judaism is transparent. Moses' allowance is contrasted with God's command."¹²¹ "Divorce is grounded in the Law, but marriage is grounded in creation."¹²² Thus, Jesus is teaching that both husband and wife must understand the importance of maintaining the marriage bond intact. The teaching in verses 11-12 will enable the disciples to understand what the true marriage relationship involves in future, when they have the responsibility in the Church of guiding those who wish to marry according to God's will.¹²³ Although Jesus accepted the reality of divorce, He prohibited remarriage.

Jesus puts man and woman on a footing of complete equality after divorce. Man is a husband not a judge. For Jesus, divorce is not only an offence against the Law but also against the rejected wife herself. "The new feature in Jesus' reply is His declaration that a husband can commit adultery against his wife."¹²⁴ Mark interpretation attributes greater guilt to re-marriage after divorce than to the divorce. For Jesus, divorce and remarriage are in formal violation of the precepts of the Decalogue, an offence against the 6th Commandment (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18).

Presumably Jesus' teaching on the matter is already known both by the Pharisees and by the readers of Mark's Gospel....The Law had been destroyed after Israel's alliance with

¹²⁰ Linden, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹²¹ Collins, , *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹²² JR . *op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹²³ Welch and Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹²⁴ A.M. Hunter, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: A Commentary*, ed. by David L. Edwards (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 104.

the golden calf and that, in its stead, a more permissive version of the Law was promulgated as a concession to the people's hardheartedness. Within this perspective, the 'concession' of Dt 24:1-4 would have belonged to the less demanding version of the Law given to Israel....From a Semitic perspective, the heart is the depth of the human person, the source of strength, intelligence and perspective....To be hardhearted is to have turned away from God with all the moral consequences which that entails.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

CHAPTER THREE.

3. APPLICATION: DIVORCE AMONG THE WA-EMBU COMMUNITY.

INTRODUCTION.

This chapter deals with how Jesus teaching on divorce can be adapted and inculcated into Wa-Embu culture. This is because the modern Wa-Embu have adopted a hostile, if not total disregard, attitude for their own culture in matters pertaining to importance of preservation of marriage bond. The only survival of traditional divorce procedures is that relatives or neighbours in the village try to reconcile a warring couple.¹²⁶ Traditionally, young people were brought up fearing and respecting traditional culture which banned them from marrying recklessly or without parental consent.¹²⁷ Therefore, apart from the Gospel, there is something that the Wa-Embu Christians can learn from their traditional society.

3.1. DIVORCE IN THE TRADITIONAL WA-EMBU COMMUNITY.

When people got married, they were believed to become *one* and divorce was not expected.¹²⁸ However, the Wa-Embu understood and realised that, despite all their efforts in educating and instilling discipline to the youth, some marriages lead to divorce. Divorce was a great tragedy which undid the work of the entire community in creating a new home. The traditional Wa-Embu had to make good arrangement for marriages in

¹²⁶ Josiah, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹²⁸ H.S. Kabeca Mwaniki, *Embu Historical Texts* (Nairobi: E.A.L.B., 1974), p. 33.

order to avoid separation and divorce. Preparation for marriage began before the couple to be met one another. Family life education was their first priority.¹²⁹

Initiation into adulthood provided special opportunities for concentrated teaching on matters of family life.... When a boy and a girl loved each other and wished to marry there was a clear procedure to follow.... At each stage, the participants were on the look-out for causes which could prevent the marriage taking place: for example, if the boy and the girl were related; if one of them had had already married and not been customarily divorced; or if one of them was a thief or otherwise of bad conduct.¹³⁰

Marriage was not a union of two individuals but a social function since the parents and the clans of the girl and the boy were involved. The girl and the boy after marriage became the members of the two families. It was the interest of the entire community to bring the couple to their senses and help them to live together in harmony if marriage showed signs of strains. However, the relatives did not interfere in the couple's home unless they were called to settle disputes.

In traditional Wa-Embu, a man was allowed to marry as many wives as he wished provided he was able to support them.¹³¹ It has also to be noted that barrenness or infertility was not a ground for divorce because if the problem was the woman, then the man married another woman but kept the elder wife. If the man was infertile or impotent, another man from his family or clan, or close a relative would get the children for him.¹³² Traditionally, there were some major grounds for divorce. If a woman talked scornfully to her husband, this was regarded as an abuse or an assault and could lead to divorce.

¹²⁹ Josiah. op. cit., p. 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 1-2.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³² Ibid., p. 9.

This was because the husbands had final say, although the advice of the wives was accepted. If a woman did not uphold the expected standards of society, e.g., refusing to attend a woman giving birth even if they had just quarrelled, she was considered to be a witch by the society and her husband could disown her.¹³³ In a case whereby the woman refused to work or give her husband food, this could easily lead to divorce because it was taken as disobedience. Adultery constituted the greatest ground for divorce and therefore, if a man or a woman was caught in adultery, this could automatically lead to divorce. Violence and refusal to provide for the wife could mean that the woman had a right to initiate divorce.¹³⁴

In traditional Wa-Embu community, a man did not wake up or come home during the night and tell his wife to pack and go. In case the couple disagreed, and the husband was thinking of leaving his wife for good, he had to announce or give notice of the fact by initially sending her to her father's home. If the people sent by her father to plead for her settled the disagreement with her husband, the woman was returned to her husband's home. However, she was given a serious warning not to repeat that kind of mistake again. "If there were repeated offences, or if the provisional committee was unable to bring about reconciliation, then the father-in-law was informed and the case was forwarded to the higher council of elders."¹³⁵ The important work of the council of elders was to discourage divorce although where necessary, they could grant it when they did so with one accord. "If the couple had lived together for a long time divorce would not be granted

¹³³ Mwaniki, *Embu Historical Texts*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

¹³⁴ Josiah, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

even if they disagreed. It was held that if they did not disagree when they were young, they cannot hate each other when they are old.”¹³⁶ It was very hard for a woman to divorce if she had a son because he could be told when mature that he belong to so and so and then he could go back to his father. For the council of elders to permit divorce, this was made through an oath which the man had to take. The oath taking was a religious act because the ancestors were believed to be involved. The main motives of oath taking was to protect the woman and her family from vengeful acts by her former husband.

After the oath was taken, it was declared that each person was no longer the husband or wife of the other person.... The woman was then considered free to remarry. The man ... was permitted to remarry and even to make polygamous marriages.¹³⁷

3.2. POINT FOR DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE WITH MARK’S THEOLOGY OF DIVORCE.

“Traditionally, the Wa-Embu did not react to breaches of custom with harsh discipline. If laws were broken then the council of elders tried to reconcile people and to bring them back to the clan.”¹³⁸ In this point, the Wa-Embu are close to the trend of the teaching of Jesus which is against legalism.

Wa-Embu understood and realised that, despite all their efforts in educating, guiding and counselling the youth, some marriages lead to divorce. They are closer to Jesus who does not directly condemn divorce but challenges the Pharisees to consider why Moses allowed divorce and wants them to look for underlying cause. Jesus does not

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

prophetically condemns divorce but the patriarch mind-set which leads support to any easy repudiation of one's wife.

In traditional Wa-Embu community, the causes of divorce were several and both parties could initiate divorce like the Romans. However they did not merely divorce in order to remarry like the Jews and the Romans. Here they are close to Jesus who accepts the reality of divorce although He prohibits remarriage.

Any of the parties in marriage could commit adultery. In this point, the Wa-Embu are close to Jesus. However, for Wa-Embu, adultery automatically leads to divorce. Jesus is against divorce in Mark; He also does not accuse the woman caught in adultery but forgives her (cf. Jn 8:3-11). The Wa-Embu have to learn from Jesus about forgiveness.

The traditional Wa-Embu allowed divorce if life became unbearable and remarriage. Thus, they had no idea of indissolubility of marriage. Jesus is teaching them that, divorce and remarriage is adultery.

The Wa-Embu did not uphold Biblical aspect of unity and equal partnership in marriage since they allowed polygyny. The Wa-Embu ought to learn from Jesus that when a man and a woman marry, they become one flesh, thus monogamy is the ideal form of marriage for Christians.

3.3. EFFECTS OF DIVORCE.

The pain of divorce runs deeper than most people wish to admit. One of the parties may suffer economically if this divorce is not recognised legally because there will be no distribution of the property. In Wa-Embu context, women who have been divorced are seen as social misfits by the entire community.

If the children are left by their father or mother, they live unhappy lives. In most cases, they are not taken care of properly for they end up lacking basic needs. Such children may end up becoming thieves because they are in need of these things.

The chief reason against divorce is the havoc it works in the life of the child.... Parents who break up the home deprive the child of the environment in which it should grow up.... The children may love both their parents and become confused as to which side to take or why they should have to take side.¹³⁹

Children of divorced parents suffer emotionally. The rearing of a child requires both parents for a balanced development of the child. Children who have seen their parents divorce may do the same in future.

Some children feel God is punishing them. Or they feel guilty, thinking they somehow caused the divorce. Worse still, they think that the best way to solve problems is to run away from them.¹⁴⁰

When the couples divorce, the families on both sides become enemies. Each family blames the other for the divorce.... The community as a whole loses confidence in either the man or the woman. The disputes surrounding the divorce create hatred, beginning with the children, who hate either the father or the mother.¹⁴¹

Divorce is ruinous to society because if it involves prominent people, the young generation will not see marriage as a divine institution. It has encouraged prostitution in Embu. This is because when a woman is divorced, she needs things to keep her life going normally and this will influence weaker women as well as young girls and boys. When prostitution increases, this leads to street children who are now seen roaming the streets of every town in Kenya seeking for food and shelter.¹⁴² Prostitution increases the chances of getting sexual transmitted diseases. Since a failed marriage represents a human tragedy for those involved, it is a social evil.

¹³⁹ Milton A. Gonsalves, Fagothey's Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice, 9th ed. (Ohio: Merrill Publishing Company, 1986), p. 325.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Kabui, "How to Arrest Conflicts and Divorce," Today in Africa, no. 243, June 2000, p. 28.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 27.

3.4. THE TRADITIONAL WA-EMBU WAYS OF CONTROLLING DIVORCE.

In order to discourage divorce, our young people must be taught not to have premarital sex. In traditional Wa-Embu community, girls and boys were encouraged to be virgins before marriage. If the girl was a virgin before marriage, she was given many presents. If a girl was impregnated before marriage, this was considered to be unholy.¹⁴³ According to Josiah, “Teaching is the key to good behaviour and can help people change their ways of life. Since parents seem to have abandoned giving instructions to the youth, institutions such as schools and the Church have a role to play.”¹⁴⁴

The modern Wa-Embu ought to deter early marriages as the traditional Wa-Embu did. “One had to be of age that is circumcised...”¹⁴⁵ to get married.

Force marriages must be discouraged. Traditional Wa-Embu disliked force marriages before the parents consented. Men who did so were not respected and they had to be fined. Elopement was never heard in Embu.¹⁴⁶ Today if a boy impregnate a girl, he may be forced to marry such a girl. The modern Wa-Embu Christians ought to know that such a marriage may not succeed.

The modern Wa-Embu ought to do some investigations about the suitability or unsuitability of the husband or the wife to be. In traditional Wa-Embu community, “The investigations usually included whether there was any relationship such as tradition disapproved; whether the other family was a *cursed one*; whether the girl or boy was of

¹⁴³ H.S. Kabeca Mwaniki, The Living History of Embu and Mbeere to 1906 (Nairobi: E.A.L.B., 1973). p. 100.

¹⁴⁴ Josiah, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ Mwaniki, Living History of Embu and Mbeere, op. cit., p. 99.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

good character, hard working and whether any of the parties was subject to any tobacco. The investigation might even check whether the boy's family was a wealthy one!"¹⁴⁷ If possible, this need to be done by the parents as it was done traditionally.

Trial marriages must be discouraged. Therefore, it is also necessary for the girl before getting married to pay a visit to the boy's home as it was done traditionally. "Before the girl went to the boy's home for life, she would make a preliminary visit to the house-to-be."¹⁴⁸ However during such visit, she was not supposed to sleep with the boy, but she was allowed to sleep only in the house of the boy's mother. This was because "Sexual intimacy came to lovers after parents had consented to their marriage."¹⁴⁹ There was no trial marriage in traditional Wa-Embu community.¹⁵⁰

There is need of advising the couple on married life especially by the elders before marriage takes place as it was done traditionally.

The modern Wa-Embu Christians need to learn from the traditional society about the importance of reconciliation. "Wa-Embu cultures laid great stress on trying to reconcile the couple in divorce cases. Before a divorce could be granted, the couple had to meet with their relatives and later with the council of elders, so that attempts could be made to reconcile them."¹⁵¹ "Traditional society saw that it was good practice for people to become counsellors. It recognised that in the early stages of marriage, disagreements

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁰ Josiah, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

are inevitable, but that the couple can lay firm foundation for their home if they agree to listen to others, that is if there is effective communication.”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 16.

CONCLUSION.

The causes of divorce we see today in contemporary Wa-Embu such as: culture, lack of traditional education; equality of men and women; marrying for pleasure; unequal level of education; forced marriages; urbanisation; mismanagement of finances; bearing children of one gender; impotence, sterility or barrenness were not at all causes of divorce in traditional Wa-Embu community. Some contemporary Wa-Embu Christians have adopted a hostile attitude, if not total disregard, for their own culture in matters pertaining to importance of preservation of marriage bond. This is understandable since Cultural Revolution is an ongoing process and everybody is very much affected. The author is inclined to agree with the elders that divorce is linked to decline of traditional culture,¹⁵³ and that traditional values which are in line with the Gospel teaching on marriage ought to remain and be safeguarded as they are the essence of moral integrity of every society.

It should be born in mind that there is no direct evidence as to the original form of the question raised to Jesus by the Pharisees when Mark's theology of divorce is being used as a basis for deciding current questions about divorce. Thus, if the wife or the husband in a marriage is abused in violence that may lead to death, I would suggest that in such a case, divorce is justified and no woman or man ought to persevere. This is because the attitude of violence has left many men, women and children with broken limbs, teeth and ended the lives of others.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 17.

For Wa-Embu Christians who wish to follow Jesus, His teaching on divorce appears as a future challenge. For some, it is difficult to apply Jesus' teaching to the problem of divorce in the modern world. However, the author would say that, for the sake of the common good, there should be no divorce. This is because marriage is indissoluble for those that are capable of leading a life that conforms to the will of God.

There is need of taking Christian marriage as a journey which involves a lot of sacrifice and suffering. Since we are limited and we are not perfect, married people should not lose hope and courage even though marriage life seems difficult. Thus there is need for all of us to try by all means to fulfil the demands of the ideal marriage proposed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

In our modern society, I would recommend those to wed to go first for medical check up to find out whether they have serious impediment such as impotence. It were better if people marry those of their faith, interests, level of education, occupation, and economy.

Since it is not possible today to have traditional education which was given through the families and during initiation rites, responsible parenthood should be taught in schools and by the Church during catechises classes. Seminars and workshops should be organised for those preparing for marriage and marriage encounter for couples already married. Small Christian communities should be used as the basis for the seminars and workshops. There is need for the Church to train elders, catechists and other interested Christians to be able to act as marriage counsellors. There is need to train Christian

teachers to run Religious Education Programs in schools, in which sacraments and responsible leadership are taught.

Those who have married should not be left by themselves, but instead, it is the duty of all people of good will to keep on advising and encouraging these people. There is need for rigorous campaign to convince contemporary Wa-Embu Christians that sterility does not invalidate a marriage. Divorce of an infertile partner was unheard of in traditional Wa-Embu community.

Bible reading should be encouraged in the families. This will help couples to know and appreciate their roles. In the spirit of adaptation and inculturation, some traditional Wa-Embu values can be adapted and inculturated to the modern Wa-Embu Christian life.

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