IN GO(L)D WE TRUST: LITERARY AND ECONOMIC CURRENCY EXCHANGE IN THE DEBATE OVER CAESAR'S COIN (MARK 12:13-17)

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> Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him and he worships it (Karl Marx *On the Jewish Question* 3.172).

An Historical Context

A Marxist analysis of Mark's famous story recognises a complex mixture of materialism and production, exchange value, the fetishism of place and money, symbolic and linguistic ideology and the reproduction of social relations, spatial organisation and commodification. In preparation for this exercise, I propose to begin with an interplay of forces, tensions, ideological representations and contradictions more akin to Karl Marx's time and place.[1]

At the onset of that most fraught period in Britain and Europe, the 1830s to 1850s, a Dissenting Minister and teacher in Scotland invited other Dissenters to refuse to pay the Government such tax as would be used to finance the Established Church, the Church of England. The Rev'd Dr. John Brown's rejection of the Annuity Tax began in 1830 and gained a substantial number of adherents over the next few years. Robert Haldane, a well-published Calvinist, launched a number of public letters designed to refute Brown's argumentation. These were gathered into a book published in 1838.[2]

Much of the debate focussed on the interpretation of two biblical texts: Romans 13:1-7 and the Synoptic story of "rendering

[1] I am grateful to the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar for initial comments on this paper in June 2004.

[2] R. Haldane, *The Duty of Paying Tribute, Enforced in Letters to the Rev. Dr. John Brown, Occasioned by his Resisting the Payment of the Annuity Tax* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1838).

unto Caesar". Haldane held that they reinforced each other.[3] As he constructed his argument, Jesus' answer to his questioners was "calculated to place the subject of paying tribute in the plainest and clearest light to his people in every situation."[4] He rejected Brown's restriction of the story to a past culture.[5] Indeed, claimed Haldane, Jesus paid no attention to the uses to which tribute was applied at any time, not wishing to "burden the consciences of his people". The duty was determined; it preserved the peace of civil society, and mercifully freed Christians from the responsibility of decision. Their money bore the impress of the government under which God had placed them—the payment of tax, Haldane argued, is the price God "has appointed for having their lives and possessions secured by that Government."[6]

The polarised positions of Brown and Haldane have been played out in minor variations long since. Richard Horsley, for example, recognised the serious religio-political conflict in the story not merely the focus on Jesus' skilful escape. He argued that there was neither a complementary nor subordinationist relationship between God and Caesar in the statement Jesus rendered. Rather, Jesus articulates a thoroughly "Jewish theocratic understanding"—that all belongs to God (cf. Mark 8:33).[7] The same economic assumption undergirded the immediately preceding parable of a vineyard that was owned and controlled by an absentee Yahwistic overlord (Mark 12:1-9).[8] The conjunction "and" (καί) of so many authorised translations of this passage might therefore be better replaced by "but" (cf. Mark 14:59).[9]

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[3] Haldane drew heavily for his exposition of Romans 13 on his own commentary. Over a century later, it remained published: *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans with a foreword by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958).

[4] Haldane, *Exposition*, p. 30.

[5] Haldane, *Exposition*, p. 37.

[6] Haldane, *Exposition*, p. 30. The argument is not new. E. Stauffer has the *Shepherd of Hermas* (early second century) say the same: *Christ and the Caesars* (London: SCM, 1955), p. 130.

[7] R. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 306-317, cf. F. Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), pp. 187-188.

[8] A slightly imperialised version of the Isaiah 5 rendition—see R. Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), pp. 169-179.

[9] This is the reading of Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 60, n. 23; see also C. Myers, *Binding the*

The opposite view is ubiquitous, proposing either a "two worlds" understanding of the story or a subordinationist view. Both these interpretations read Jesus as endorsing Caesar's rule in some measure, no matter how the text (or is it the reader?) is massaged to gain acceptance.[10] The recent commentary of R.T. France is as typical as it is compliant: "…the payment is not only 'permitted', but is in fact right in itself, so that to withhold it would be to defraud."[11] Unwittingly perhaps, France equates a tax-resister to the rich young man who was told that the path to eternal life was not only the observation of the social requirements of the Decalogue but also of the additional requirement, unique to Mark's Gospel, of not defrauding (Mark 10:19). The commandments and the story along with the pronouncement in Mark 12:17 thus become improving texts for the propertied class. The almost universal emphasis on the historicity of the story in Mark 12 bolsters the civic duty extracted from the passage by giving it unquestioned dominical authenticity, somehow thereby making it transhistorical.[12]

The irony of the long-standing conflict between interpretations

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Strong Man (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), pp. 311-312, J.D.M. Derrett, *The Making of Mark: The Scriptural Bases of the Earliest Gospel* (England: P. Drinkwater, 1985), p. 202. The use of καί as an adversative or contrastive (sometimes, in a milder sense, called the "ascensive" or "parataxic" use) is not unknown (see BAGD sv καί 2g; A.T. Robertson, *The Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 1181, H.W. Smythe, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1956), §2169) and is used by J.B. Phillips in his translation of Mark 4:17. The possibility is rejected (with a revealing haste?) by J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (AB; NY: Doubleday & Co, 1985), p. 1292, cf. also R.H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 699.

[10] See, for example, R. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to read the Bible politically* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 79-84. He reiterates the corroborative force of Romans 13 for his reading of the Markan passage (p. 83). See also J.R. Donahue and D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 347.

[11] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 469. Compare Gundry who asserts that "eschatology does not cancel ethics" (*Mark*, p. 699) thus, like Haldane, constructing a timeless metaphysic of ethics that no historical shift can challenge. It would be hard to surpass the blatant defence of imperialism by Ethelbert Stauffer: "the payment of tribute to Caesar is not only your unquestioned obligation; it is also your moral duty", "To pay the imperial tax means to fulfil God's will for history" (pp. 129, 131, cf. p. 135).

[12] V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 478; disputes over the foundational story between the claims of Mark, P. Eger 2.2, GT §100, Justin Martyr 1*Apol* 17.2 do not seem to affect the assertion of authenticity.

found expression in Marxist writings. Marx himself made a number of forays into the "render to Caesar" text. He adopted the long-standing line that Christian teaching from Jesus to Paul promoted submission to the authorities, for all authority is ordained by God. But he did so for dialectical and polemical criticism.[13] His counter-praxis is perhaps best illustrated in the inflammatory peroration of an article for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (published on 17 November, 1848, when he was editor-in-chief): "Taxpaying is High Treason; Tax Avoidance is the First Duty of the Citizen!"[14] Predictably, it landed him in the Cologne Assizes.

By contrast, the preoccupation of the later polymathic Marxist, Ernst Bloch, with the announcement of an eschatological qualification on the present, interprets the words given to Jesus as a threat to the system and a refusal to believe in it ("out of contempt for the state"[15]); they bear a utopian vision energising a movement towards change. He deliberately turns Caesar and Christ into an irreconcilable conflict;[16] here is no opium but protest.[17] Thus the dispute over the coin yields an eschatological reality where there is no contrast between this world and an immaterial beyond, but rather where this world is already submerged in the (irrepressible hope of the) next. "Caesar does not matter precisely because the Kingdom is close at hand…For all its outward pomp, the Roman Empire is as irrelevant and unessential as an overnight stay in an inn which one is going to leave at daybreak." Bloch wrests control of the text's meaning from Paul who "flogged [it] to death" and "later Christians of compromise" like Luther who gave it "a dualistic sense …[a] keeping [of] twin accounts."[18]

Two further elements, seemingly unconnected with early modern

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[13] K. Marx, "On the Christian State" in S.K. Padover (ed.), *On Religion* (Karl Marx Library 5; NY: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 23-24.

[14] From S.K. Padover (ed.), *On Freedom of the Press and Censorship* (Karl Marx Library 4; NY: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 130, 194.

[15] E. Bloch, *Man on his Own* (trans. E.B Ashton; NY: Herder & Herder, 1970), p. 124; similarly, Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity* (trans. J.T. Swann; NY: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 143.

[16] He titles one chapter in his *Atheism in Christianity* as "Aut Caesar aut Christus?" The theme recurs frequently; see *Man on his Own*, pp. 79, 114, 146.

[17] Bloch, *Man on his Own*, p. 114. For a thorough tracking of the ascription of opiate and Christianity, see H. Gollwitzer, *The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion* (trans. D. Cairns; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1970), pp. 15-23.

[18] Bloch, *Atheism*, pp. 134, 139; *Man on his Own*, pp. 124, 185.

debate need to be introduced. The first is a reprise of reliance on the passage about Caesar's coin that crops up in one of the manifold books on numismatics that had begun to proliferate at the time.

William Till, an early nineteenth century English numismatist and medallion-maker, drew on the Renaissance inheritance of the moral, aesthetic and educational benefits of the collection of ancient coins[19]—the images of such Roman imperial women as Julia Titi, Sabina and Faustina were "models of female beauty."[20] He claimed dominical approval for the denarius. "It is honoured pre-eminently", he wrote, "inasmuch as it is the coin to whose image and superscription Jesus Christ drew the attention of the Jews…" This allusive language of "image and superscription," seamlessly combining Christian Scripture and imperial numismatics into an irresistible fabric, survives in the magisterial work of Harold Mattingly.[21] The sheer gazing on the coin would yield moral advancement, just as Jesus had enjoined. Till goes on to note that the obverse side bearing the impress of the emperor Tiberius was critical to the argument: "Jesus taught them to render to the personage thus depicted".[22] The imperial dominance, in visual and linguistic frame, was repeated in the way in which books on numismatics were ordered, that is, by chronology and illustration of the various Roman emperors.[23] The contemporary significance of such an arrangement was plain in the way in which Europe's own mimetic coins were struck. The moral benefit, said to derive from meditation on money, was implicitly and explicitly shackled to political acquiescence and a submissive embrace of economics.[24]

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[19] See J. Cunally, *Images of the Illustrious: the numismatic presence in the Renaissance (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[20] W. Till, *An Essay on the Roman Denarius and English Silver Penny* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1838), p. 50.

[21] H. Mattingly, *Roman Coins: From the Earliest Times to the Fall of the Western Empire* (London: Methuen & Co, 1928), p. 144.

[22] Till, *Essay*, p. 31.

[23] See, for example, the heavily influential *Description Historique des Monnaies* by Henry Cohen (Paris: Rollin & Feuardent, 8 Vols, 1880; repr Graz: Akademische Druck- U. Verlagsanstalt, 1955).

[24] For a current example of the same tripartite conjunction of morality, politics and economics (in the Australian context), see M. Maddox, *God under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), *passim.*

This introduces the second element: the curious admixture of appeals to the ancients as models for economic education and monetary systems. Parallels were drawn between ancient and contemporary coins not only in their aesthetics but also in their exchange values. Coins—in Marxist description the fetishism *par excellence* of the alienation of subjectivity from production—were themselves compounded in exchange value, as their ancient "value" was reinscribed to the rise of capitalism, based on their designated rarity. Ancient history itself also became commodified, given an exchange value in contemporary terms. Thus George Reynolds, in 1730, proved undeniably to his own mind that Solomon's temple cost £1217,170,828/9/1.[25] This interconnection between ancient and modern exchange value was part of a larger programme that infected Europe from the Renaissance onwards—that of emulating and appropriating ancient grandeur to promote national identity, the legitimacy of a nation's rulers and the expansion of markets.

It would be tempting to use Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* to expose the mining of historical veins for the ideological rhetoric that concealed the intent of the interconnection of ancient numismatics, sacred Scripture, governmental precedents and so on. As Marx wrote:

> The task of their epoch…was the emancipation and establishment of modern bourgeois society, in Roman costume and with Roman slogans…[They] found in the stern classical traditions of the Roman republic the ideals, art forms and self-deceptions they needed in order to hide from themselves the limited bourgeois content of their struggles…[26]

The comment could equally apply to England or Germany, with the minor variation that the "borrowed historical clothing"[27] was accessorised with styles, forms and fashions from the Roman principate.

An Exercise in Theoretical Self-Reflection

The combination of numismatics, clashing interpretations of biblical passages, and recapitulations of history all take place in writ-

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[25] G. Reynolds, *The History of Ancient Coins, Weights and Measures, including the Life and Glorious Actions of King Solomon* (London: W. Shropshire, 1730), p. 72.

[26] Marx, *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings Vol 2* (ed. D. Fernbach; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 147-148.

[27] To use Paul Hamilton's felicitous phrase: *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 104.

ing. Now while there may be some debate between Marxists over the relationship between the textualised and the real[28] and whether the division is sustainable, there is agreement that literature cannot be studied apart from an awareness of its historical connectives, its materialist base. Writing therefore is not the primary reality but secondary to the socio-economic configurations that give rise to it, albeit irreducible to a mechanical, unilinear determinism.[29] This is not merely the craft and literacy of the production of an artistic or literary work,[30] but the interpenetration of that literary work in the stresses and strains of the complex relationships grounded in economic activity. Hence the gospel accounts are not merely about ideas—they are themselves participants in the contention over the way the socio-economic realities affect both writer and hearer, from the resistant challenge to the polite endorsement. They may themselves be witness to the contradictions, even inconsistencies, arising eco-politically and ideologically in a particular epoch. The horizon extends beyond the text to the socio-economic realities of the world wherein the text is produced—not just concern for history but for the economic realities determining history and how history is written.

For biblical study that utilises a Marxist methodology, there are four available approaches:

i) a Marxist analysis of a particular narrative and the world-views contained within it. This is in no way to delimit the narrative to its own terms of reference, adopting such solypses as "the world created by the writing" or its "mythic dimension" but rather to set the narrative against its assumed narrative world, that is a world shared with a reader at the time of writing. Labour, economic value, commodification, alienation and the policing mechanisms related to these will all be found in the text even if they are not the main focus of the writer. An analysis of the text will not necessarily be univocal. It may be dialectic, moving between, for example, the polarities of meaning evidenced by Marx and Bloch's different

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[28] Compare Boer, *Marxist Criticism*, and Hamilton, *Historicism*.

[29] That is, there is a productive and reproductive interchange between historical materialism and literary materialism, or economics and ideology: Boer, *Marxist Criticism*, p. 7; A.F. McGovern, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), pp. 80-81.

[30] See generally, L. Baxandall and S. Morawski (eds.), *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Literature and Art* (NY: International General, 1973).

treatments of the story of Caesar's coin. The particular contribution of Bloch's approach is that it subverts the hegemonic claim (whether that be from an economic or ecclesial class—there is usually no difference) that a particular text bears only one (blatantly "plain") meaning.[31] For him, the Bible was "chock-full of threatening volcanic crevasses" in spite of the Church's efforts to smooth them over.[32]

ii) a Marxist analysis of the writing, interests and perspectives of the authored text, frequently an analysis of the role of the author in relation to the society of which she or he is part. While this may sometimes overlap with the first level it can be analysed discretely. The control of the means of graphemic production in a society that relies so heavily on writings (inscriptions, education, scriptoria, courier service, scribes) predisposes a suspicion towards *any* writing as silencing those voices which are weak within the socio-economic arrangement of that world—slaves, children, women, subjugated peoples.[33] Hence written records about Jesus will be regarded as suspect and will need to demonstrate the extent to which voices marginalised by literacy have been heard. For example, Ferdinand Belo's criticism of Mark's Gospel is that while it is a text of a story of radical change it becomes interrupted by a preoccupation with the significance of Jesus' death. The move from the rendition of the execution of a subversive messianic element to the construction of an otherworldly, mythic drama engineers an escape from concern about issues of justice—making the death of Jesus not an instance of the ruthless crushing of a critical voice by an immensely powerful Roman state machinery but the timeless abstraction of an atonement for individual sinfulness,[34] not least insofar as the text itself fosters the (myth of) innocence of the atoning victim through

[31] This is related to Bloch's understanding that texts, however ideologically motivated and subjected to profound repudiation, yet contain the anticipation of the liberating new; see D. Kellner, "Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique" in J.O. Daniel and T. Moylan (eds.), *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 82-85.

[32] Bloch, *Atheism*, p. 81.

[33] Merold Westphal's acknowledgment, borrowed from Paul Ricoeur, of Marx (and Freud and Nietzsche), as master(s) of the school of suspicion is applied primarily to the *third* of my approaches, thereby retreating from the *foundation* of that approach—the biblical text itself. Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 13-14.

[34] See, for example, Belo, *Materialist Reading*, pp. 238-240.

the inability of the testing interrogation (as in Mark 12:13-15) to undermine or unsettle Jesus.[35]

iii) a Marxist analysis of the history of interpretation of the text. This will inevitably demand an analysis of the interests and operations of the interpreter/interpretation in relation to wider social relations and economic interests. Alertness to the repetitions of textual practice is crucial not to cultivate any sense of the "everywhere, at all times, by everyone" ideology of ecclesial orthodoxy but as a technique of demystification of the claim to continuity and traditional authority asserted by economic interests that control the text and its dissemination.[36] Moreover, as this paper began, it ensures that the primary claim of history is not understood as a monochromatic or transparent progression towards a yet-receding utopia (the teleological fallacy)[37] but as riddled with the tensions, contradictions and permutations of varieties of class struggles.[38] "Truth and rationality are…immanent to the historical moment" even as the moment exists irrationally.[39] This lies behind Marx's call not merely to consider the mammon of Caesar but the fine reason of the Caesar of this world—in other words, to push the traditional interpretation promoting deference to the things of

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[35] See E.A. Castelli and H. Taussig, "Drawing Large and Startling Figures: Reimagining Christian Origins" in Castelli and Taussig (eds.), *Reimagining Christian Origins* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), pp. 3-20.

[36] See my "Swords into Ploughshares: The End of War?" in N.C. Habel and V. Balabanski (eds.), *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 58-59.

[37] See P. Lekas, *Marx on Classical Antiquity* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1988), pp. 30-50.

[38] For Georg Lukács, class in the ancient world cannot be analysed apart from status; economic and legal categories are inextricably interwoven. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (trans. R. Livingstone; London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 55-59; cf. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 61-69. For Marx, the relationship of the individual to the group, so dominant in the ancient world, resists the total subjectivisation characteristic of capitalist economies: Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (ET trans. M. Nicolaus; Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973), pp. 485-487. Nevertheless, many of the traits that came to dominate in capitalist economies were already being "trialled" in the (Roman) world of late antiquity. See, for example, Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling; ed. F. Engels; London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), vol. 1, p. 140.

[39] G.E. McCarthy, *Marx and the Ancients: Classical Ethics, Social Justice, and Nineteenth-Century Political Economy* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990), p. 200.

Caesar, defined in terms of payment of taxes, towards an analysis of the intricate relations of money to the politico-economic systems of this world through history and the eager refinement of media manipulations that author and authorise those relations. In so doing, as Marx would fondly have it, the things of God would be exposed as complicit in that fine reason.[40] Here, the dialectic becomes particularly strong as Bloch's antithesis of Caesar and Christ is poised with Marx's fundamental unity of God and Caesar, with both requiring an equally fundamental atheism as an expression/tactic of political resistance in, with and through textual analysis.[41]

iv) a Marxist analysis of the very act of writing a Marxist analysis at any of the preceding three levels. This self-critique, or exposure to the critique of a materialist-grounded community, is one of the most disturbing but crucial elements of praxis. It confronts a writer with interests he or she is serving, wittingly or unwittingly, not merely in the production of meaning, but in the mechanisms of the reproduction of the means of production (whether that be politico-economic, ecclesiological or literary). The history of Christianity witnesses the remarkable achievement of the transfiguration of a subversive movement to an imperial religion, from an atheistic refusal to a theistic endorsement. Our very inheritance of a text that can be read as a revolutionary document is dependent on our entrance into, if not complicity in, a control of the means of production that separates product from producer. One's own interests and place within the industry of biblical interpretation become qualified, whether or not free of theological constraints. What is my interest in the production of meaning from the bible within my society—how does this meaning-making operate? Is it a praxis reality where the radical eschatological critique of the way things are turns to engagement in the struggle for change?[42] Is it a critical self-silencing that looks for other voices, whether literate or not, to be heard that are not from the accepted guild of interpretation? Does it challenge the canons of acceptable readings by exposing the interests that are being served—whether of the

[40] Marx, "On Religion," p. 23.
[41] Compare Bloch, *Man on his Own*, pp. 143-144.
[42] See Ernst Bloch *et al.*, *Aesthetics and Politics* (trans. R. Taylor; London: Verso, 1990).

academy or the economic structure? Does it recognize the class base from which reading inevitably proceeds?

Clearly, one essay cannot address each of these levels in depth. The introductory historical setting provides a nod of acknowledgement to level three, but this has primarily contributed to an awareness that the Synoptic story of Caesar's coin cannot be divorced from specific historical connections and is replete with contradictions arising in its own performance as ideological reinforcement.

An Application

In a footnote in the first volume of the *Capital* Marx reminds the reader: "Temples with the ancients served as the dwellings of the gods of commodities. They were 'sacred banks'". The recognition is rarely mentioned in analyses of the world of late antiquity,[43] let alone the story of Caesar's coin. The intricate connection between space, religion, commodities and money is pushed into the shadows as commentators attend to the dynamics of personal conflict in the story, enthralled, it appears, by the brilliance of Christological insight.[44] Accordingly, vast amounts of text are contributed to:

— why the Herodians were present and interested in the question of the capitation tax (given that Galilee was not subject to tribute nor direct Roman rule),[45]
— who the "they" were who sent the Herodians and Pharisees to question Jesus (deciding upon the chief priests, scribes and elders of 11:27),[46]

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[43] For example the collection of essays edited by M.V. Fox, *Temple in Society* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1988), barely mentions the role of the temple as treasury.

[44] So Gundry, *Mark*, p. 692: "Jesus' marvellous escape from the horns of a dilemma". For a peasant-focussed reading that nuances the amazement of both characters and interpreters, see W.R. Herzog, "Dissembling, a Weapon of the Weak: The Case of Christ and Caesar in Mark 12:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7" *PRS* 21 (1994), pp. 339-360.

[45] F.F. Bruce, "Render to Caesar" in E. Bammel and C.F.D. Moule (eds.), *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), pp. 250-251; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 467.

[46] France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 464; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 343; Gundry, *Mark*, p. 292.

— upon what Hebrew Scriptures (and/or Septuagint) Jesus might be assumed to be obediently reliant,[47]
— the significance of the coin to this array of people.

The standard explanation of sandwiching Jesus between Roman authorities concerned about subversion on the one hand and popular resistance to Roman tax burdens and their symbolics on the other is sometimes modulated by reference to Herodian tax-farming interests and Sadducean concern for relative, albeit accommodated, autonomy.[48] Even those who work from some form of historical materialist commitment are more concerned at the chronological frame of Jewish-Roman relations.[49]

Three aspects are rarely if ever addressed by commentators, all of which relate more or less to the spatial reinforcement of politico-economic relations presumed in the text.[50] Firstly, there is little exploration of the spatial setting delivered repeatedly by Mark, accented by the main character, Jesus, and made the major issue at the so-called trial.[51] This is the temple (11:1, 15-16, 27; 12:35; 13:1,3; 14:49). It is foregrounded in the text by the disruptive addition to the parable of the vineyard immediately preceding the story of Caesar's coin, in the reference to the temple key-stone (12:10-11)—though most commentators see the parable as an interruption to a series of apophthegms.[52] Secondly, though major essays of antiquarian interest have been written identifying the coin that was brought before Jesus, no analysis is given of exchange value and the commodification of life that this coin indicated, nor of the

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[47] 1 Sam 8:9 LXX; 1 Chron 26:30, 32; 2 Chron 19:11; Prov 8:15-16; Qoh 8:2; Wis 6:1-11 (Derrett, *The Making*, pp. 204-205 with many additions; Horsley, *Spiral*, p. 311). Inevitably it would seem, in the hands of interpreters the religious texts become supportive of the payment of taxes to Caesar (Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, p. 81). Curiously, Stauffer distances Jesus from Scripture (*Christ and the Caesars*, p. 122).

[48] Wengst, *PaxRomana*, p. 196 n. 14; É. Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel According to Mark* (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 91 n. 4; Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, pp. 120-121; Bruce, "Render," p. 251.

[49] Compare Horsley, *Spiral*, pp. 308-316; Bruce, "Render," pp. 249-257.

[50] This approach is quite different from the structuralist approach of Elizabeth Malbon, even though her work, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), is one of the few that recognises the importance of spatial organisation in and for the gospel.

[51] Gundry effectively rejects the possibility (*Mark*, p. 698).

[52] For example, France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 464, Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 345-346.

broad range of ideological symbolics, and the general fetishism of the monetary system—all this in spite of the attention that is given in the text not merely to "image" but also to "inscription" (v.16).[53] Thirdly, the connection between the sacralisation of space and of money remains opaque.

Edward Soja has championed the radical unfolding of the spatial bases of materialist critical theory and the contribution this makes to historical analysis.[54] Soja's acknowledgement of the work of Henri Lefebvre is clear. Roland Boer provides a neat overview in his *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* (Ch. 4). Like ideology, the production of space from place is both a social product and a social force. Its efforts to harness, control, reproduce and ideologise the means of production must for its effectiveness remain hidden. The irony is that it does so by promoting its bald monumentality not merely as a grandeur worthy of acclaim but, especially in the ancient world, by sacralising it. The "such is God", indeed "our God", proclaimed of the temple by Psalm 48 (see especially vv. 12-14) is blatantly successful given the awe of Jesus' disciples as Jesus leaves the temple for what will prove to be the last time in Mark's gospel.[55] "What wonderful stones and wonderful buildings" is met with Jesus' stony deconstructive prediction of "the death of God" (13:1-2): "in no way will one stone be left upon another".[56]

Moreover, the little apocalypse that follows is given the quite specific location of the Mount of Olives "over against" [κατέναντι] the temple (13:3, so AV, RV).[57] Lefebvre observed that the consecration of fragments of nature as "absolute space" (such as mountains, caves, springs, rivers) not only politicises nature; it compels the natural realm to serve approved social relations (bloodlines,

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[53] Some commentators note the injunction against images (Exod. 20:4): see Fitzmyer, *Luke*, p. 1296.

[54] E.W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[55] A remarkable literary achievement given that the narrative has yet to relate the so-called "trials" of Jesus by the Jewish authorities.

[56] The effort found in some manuscripts (D, W, and the Old Latin) to resurrect God by providing a substitute temple (presumably Jesus, as a temple not made with hands) is not only textually unsustainable but is also only able to be achieved by assimilation to the *false* witness of Mark 14:57-58.

[57] See Malbon, *Narrative Space*, pp. 120-126, R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 91-98.

family, as well as other associations designed to reinforce patterns of control). These are upheld by those who have not produced what they now possess (the clerisy, the military, and various dynastic successions).[58] The adversative posture of Jesus—the rejected stone—takes a natural setting that has not been monumentalised.

Olivet offers marginal locations for "alternative, submerged and repressed spaces…sites of resistance"—the spatial contradictions that the temple elicits. This is where Jesus retreats each night and provides the unclean (that is, contra-temple) space where the gospel message is forged (Bethany, the site of Simon the leper: 11:1, 12, 19; 14:3). The irony that feeds the emerging contradiction is that Bethany and Bethphage were declared to be part of the city of Jerusalem during the great pilgrim feasts so that contraventions posited by laws regulating Sabbath journeys would not arise.[59] This was just the microcosmic reflection of Jerusalem as peripheral being legitimated as a critical location in the wider spatial construction called "empire" centred on Rome.

The political tension inherent in temple space is manifold and long-term, but is significant for our purposes. Herod the Great had been largely responsible for the massive building modifications to the temple, but the association between political power and monumental spatial symbolics had been weakened shortly after his death with the division of his kingdom among his sons and the subsequent loss of Herodian control in 6 CE when Judea became a Roman province. The presence of the Herodians in the questioning of Jesus is not accidental. The reconnection of their political and economic power with the sacralising symbol is a key underlying concern. The control of space means the control of production and its fundamental benefit for the propertied class and their retainers: wealth. Hence behind the apparent alliance

[58] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. D. Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 48.

[59] This illustrates Boer's point clearly that socio-economic regulation of space necessarily produces and regulates centripetal and centrifugal sites, as well as providing locations of opposition that may prove attractive for dissident movements (*Marxist Criticism*, p. 109). At the same time, the language and the regulation of space possess an *ostensible* drive for the elimination of difference (Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 49).

of Jesus' interlocutors lies a fierce competition for "the right to the city".[60] As Derek Gregory notes:

> Spatial structure is not…merely the arena within which class conflicts express themselves but also the domain within which—and, in part, through which—class relations are constituted.[61]

There is one further element. Boer rightly aligns the symphonic distraction of worshippers and acts of worship flowing to the temple with the flow of tribute,[62] the one masking, even anaesthetising against the realities involved in the latter. One can see the connection played out in the story of one poor widow's silent protest against the temple and its treasury in Mark 12:41-44.[63] The location of this treasury (*over against* which Jesus also positions himself, again κατέναντι v.41) was on the wall separating the so-called Court of Women from the Court of the Israelites. Every boundary in the organisation of space becomes a liminal zone, from cross-roads to harbours. In the ancient world, these boundary places drew religious symbolics and meaning. That liminality is heightened in spaces organised as sacred ("the space of representation"), with a concomitant heightening of the sacralising symbolics ("the representation of space"). These symbolics seek their ultimate expression in some inner sanctum. But their inward focus is the rationalising ideology for the manifold separations that occur in social relationships, separations that order space as much as people away from the centre.[64] As Lefebvre observes,

> Whether empty or full, absolute space is therefore a highly activated space, a receptacle for, and stimulant to, both social energies and natural forces… Considered in itself—'absolutely'—absolute space is located nowhere. It has no place because it embodies all places.[65]

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[60] Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 49. On the complex relations of the Herods and the temple, see M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), *passim.*

[61] D. Gregory, *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* (London: Hutchison, 1978), p. 120.

[62] Boer, *Marxist Criticism*, pp. 108-109.

[63] On the prophetic action of the woman, see E.S. Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark and her Poor Rich Readers" in A-J. Levine (ed.) *A Feminist Companion to Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 111-127.

[64] Lefebvre recognises that this applies as much to modern society as to ancient society. It is merely the terms of reference acting as sacralising media that change. Lefebvre, *Production* pp. 120-122, 159.

[65] Lefebvre, *Production*, p. 236.

The liminality of the treasury is the liminality of the divine in which the treasury participates, spatially, ideologically and economically. David Knipe notes, "the collective wealth of the people is frequently housed in the temple, the correct place for treasure, in the safe-keeping of the deity and provider."[66] A Marxist analysis would press this observation more severely, naming the ideological reiteration that suppresses the exposure of propertied class and expropriation of surplus value. For now, it is enough to recognise that the treasury was located in the religious centre. That treasury effectively controlled (subject to Rome), *inter alia*, two crucial taxes: the annual temple tax which was required to be paid in the (most valued) Tyrian shekel, despite the presence of the God Melkart on the coin's face; and the tribute for Rome which was required to be paid in Roman coin: the silver denarius.[67] The connection of temple and tax therefore meant that debt became a sacred issue, a matter of sin,[68] as Luke recognised (and fostered) by his change to the Lord's Prayer from ὀφειλήμα to ἁμαρτία (Lk 11:4; cf. Mt. 6:12).[69] The tribute for Rome complicated this matter as well as tapping the traditional schema. Hence, the mystifying requirement of maintaining the façade of separation between tax and temple was supplied by money-changing.[70] Here, in the outer temple colonnade, foreign money, bearing alien images, was exchanged, expressing the rationale that the Jewish temple reinforced the divine injunction against images (Exod. 20:5-6).

The contradiction arising within the ideology and its relationship to temple practice becomes exposed when Jesus asks, not for any coin, but for a denarius. The petty antiquarian interest in the (3) limited types of the coin of Tiberius misses the symbolics altogether. It is only partly ameliorated by the recognition that the cult of divinisation of the emperor was already under way in

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[66] "The Temple in Image and Reality" in Fox, *Temple in Society*, p. 123.

[67] Bruce, "Render," pp. 258-259; Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, pp. 115-120, 124-127; A. Ben-David, *Jerusalem und Tyrus: Ein Beitrag zur Palastinensischen Munz und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Basel: Kyklos-Verlag, 1969).

[68] See G. Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine* (Near Eastern Studies 23; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 142, 157, 161.

[69] S. Carruth and A. Garsky, *Documenta Q: Q 11:2b-4* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), pp. 145-155.

[70] Compare A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1978), pp. 126-127.

Tiberius' time.[71] By the time of writing of Mark's gospel there had been a florid increase in imperial coinage as successive emperors impressed their claims upon the empire and sought to propagandise their stable, universal, beneficent and divine authority through the medium of coin, using both image *and* text, façade and fine reason.[72]

The Roman coin had already become the exchange value of a vast array of products in the world of late antiquity.[73] This is recognised in Mark's gospel where, twice at least, those set in contrast to Jesus measure the value of a product by deflection to the Roman monetary system. Thus, bread needed to feed thousands is measured against a substitute commodity: two hundred denarii (Mark 6:37). Perfumed nard surrendered as Jesus' death anointing is defined as waste by reference to three hundred denarii (Mark 14:5), a conversion demanding that the poor value *this* elevated commodity (money) above any other. The imperial monetary program, at least as evidenced by Mark's gospel, had thus proved quite successful. There may be one silent protest read in Mark's noting of the Roman equivalent of the widow's two lepta (ie. one quadrans: Mark 12:42). Instead of a narrative participation in the all-consuming spread of exchange value, a snide critique may be seen that aligns the narrator with the widow—the trifling amount was well-known in the empire as a standard entrance token to

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[71] H. StJ. Hart, "The coin of 'Render unto Caesar …' (A note on some aspects of Mark 12:13-17; Matt. 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26)" in Bammel and Moule, pp. 241-248.

[72] There is an array of (sometimes conflicting) material in the field of numismatics on the propaganda purposes of imperial coinage and its reliance on both text and image for those purposes: see, *inter alia*, A.H. Salisbury, "Roman Coins, the Medium with a Message: Some Examples from the Reign of Trajan" in M.R. deMaine and R.M. Taylor (eds.), *Life of the Average Roman: A Symposium* (Minnesota: PZA Publications, 1999), pp. 105-115; C.E. King, "Roman Portraiture: Images of Power?" in G.M. Paul and M. Ierardi (eds.), *Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 123-136; A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus" *JRS* 76 (1986), pp. 66-87. On the linkage between a living emperor and the cult of deified predecessors in the office, see J.E. Blamberg, "The Public Image Projected by the Roman Emperors (AD 69-117)" (PhD. Thesis, Indiana University, 1976), p. 214.

[73] Sean Freyne ponders whether the half-shekel annual temple tax required of every adult Jewish male actually hastened the monetisation of Jewish culture: "Herodian Economics in Galilee: Searching for a suitable model" in P. Esler (ed.), *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its context* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 41.

the baths.[74] This draws a dark comparison with the temple, given rabbinical scruples about the immorality of such spaces (*bSabb.* 147b).

In spite of Marx's oft-noted comment on the Roman failure completely to monetarise the empire,[75] the very failure testifies nevertheless to the intent. And that intent was vividly portrayed on the coins. Modern numismatic interest in cataloguing the various reverse designs on imperial coins fails to recognise the significance of the minted representation from a Marxist perspective. The model family, the Senate and People, the far-flung Provinces variously rescued or captured, the array of army representations, the historical heritage, animate and inanimate objects, buildings and the plethora of religious imagery are not merely useful cataloguing instruments.[76] They indicate the reach of Roman imperial monetary policy. The denarius commodified almost every aspect of Roman imperial life (such as bread or nard), promoting efficiency, calculability, predictability and above all control, extolled under the propaganda: the *Pax Romana*.

Moreover, the Roman expansion of coin production to include a heavier reliance upon writing than Greek forebears implied the monetarised control of language. Language was now controlled imperially and tied to an inscribed form. Symbolic and linguistic expression had become narrowed and converged. The very ubiquity of the coin was designed to cut out any alternate voice. The Promethean attempt is to make language the totality of the world, to control the overarching embrace of language such that any participants in that language can only conceive of things, of possibilities according to a pre-determined inscription. In the ancient world, inscriptions were deemed to speak for themselves.[77] At the moment the Pharisees and Herodians repeat their one word response[78] to the pointed question of Jesus about image *and* in-

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[74] Martial *Ep* 3.30, 8.42, Juvenal *Sat.* 6.455-7, Horace *Sat.* 3.137, Seneca *Ep.* 86.9.

[75] See, for example, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 140.

[76] See, as but one example, Mattingly, pp. 146-177.

[77] P. duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 139; J. Bodel, "Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian" in J. Bodel (ed.), *Epigraphic Evidence: Ancient History from Inscriptions* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 17-18.

[78] An ironical twist on their intent to trap Jesus "with a word" [λόγῳ] in v. 13.

scription they have become joint speakers *with* the coin, reiterating its voice, aligning themselves with it, and heralded as complicit in their own alienation. Here they become subject to "the corrupt, obfuscatory manipulation of others through the management of power at the most fundamental and insidious level, that is, in the construction of the self-consciousness of the other."[79]

But their conformity to a commodity which through image and inscription bears witness to divine pretensions—or, in Marx's terms, being promoted by and recapitulating its fetish quality—has already been intimated. The readiness with which Pharisees and Herodians obtained, and could obtain a denarius gains its significance only by reference to the spatial setting within which the fetish can find a place: the temple. An ideology promoting the divine character of debt is set into conflict with the same ideology that repudiates images. The moment the denarius is brought into the temple, the mask, the face [πρόσωπον] of the Pharisees and Herodians (and their overlords) falls to the ground. The temple and tax are manifest allies, their ideology of distinction a screen. Their collusion with evil is pointedly named in the word "test" (v.15 cf. 1:13; 8:11; 10:2).

In this sense, atheism, as an economic and political act, is the only possibility—the refusal to believe in the God of the Emperor *and* of the temple. The broad sweep of "the things of Caesar" [τὰ Καίσαρος] goes beyond a mere question of tax, and, as exposed by the ingress of the denarius, now includes the temple, its operations, its spatial reach and its deity. The "things of Caesar" is a turn of phrase familiar in the early Principate for "the cause/side of Caesar".[80] The god of Jesus' reply thus becomes set against the space, the commodified exchange value and the ideology. Little wonder that Bloch so jubilantly seized on the ascription for the early Christians: *atheoi*.[81] Here lies the "most brilliant blow for freedom,"[82] precisely because economic subjectification and ideological hypostatisation—the paraded totalisation of product, language and representation—are rejected.

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[79] R.H. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 159.

[80] See Plutarch, *Life Caesar* 34.2, *Cato Minor* 58.1.3, *Life Antony* 5.1.2, cf. Josephus, *Ant* 14.124.5.

[81] Bloch, *Man on his Own*, p. 89.

[82] *Atheism in Christianity*, p. 244.

This atheism is no metaphysical rejection nor even a protest that denounces theodicy as a failure.[83] Rather, it is grounded in a political stance against the blending of religion and state where neither is distinguishable from the other—"the religiously deified state"[84]—and each strives in tandem with the other to totalise control and remove the possibility of critique, change and difference. Such a "Moloch" God, as Bloch frequently styled it, sought to crush hope in a future of and for *this* world. Hence resistance demands atheism—in Bloch's marvellous fold-back: "without atheism, messianism has no place",[85] that is, the Christ must be an atheist, indeed, the Christ depends upon the death of God, a death that was directed towards the regulatory cultic community—the "den of bandits", the spatial organisation that exerted its control—"the temple", and ultimately the God in whose monetarised name all this was justified. Richard Rorty has expressed a preference for the terminology of "anti-clericalism" as expressive of the inherent political critique that is involved here,[86] but this unwittingly privileges the metaphysical debates over atheism (even through the denial of the rationality of such debates) and returns protest to a pre-modern European setting.[87] The point of a Marxist analysis of the Markan passage however is focussed on the mechanisms of image-making, propagandist inscription and spatial organisation that find their ideological locus in God in order to deflect attention from the politico-economic realities of exploitation. Bloch rightly saw that the emphasis on atheism was a necessary *critical* position and a necessary *eschatological* position if hope was to be grounded in a real rather than a (spatially) deferred future. Jesus' judgment on the cultic power brokers and their religio-political alliance with

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[83] These provide the focus for the attempt by W. Waite Willis to retrieve the Trinitarian God from the critique by atheism: *Theism, Atheism and the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), even though a small section is given to Marxist atheistic criticism (pp. 117-125).

[84] J. Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope* (trans. M.D. Meeks; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 111.

[85] E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (trans. N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight; Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), p. 1200.

[86] R. Rorty, "Anti-clericalism and Atheism" in M.A. Wrathall (ed.), *Religion after Metaphysics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 39-40.

[87] L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in S. Zizek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 115-117.

the state apparatus of Rome, and his judgment on the temple itself is in the end a judgment on God. Inevitably, the atheist Jesus will himself be judged a blasphemer (Mark 14:64) and executed for treason (Mark 15:26), on the one hand placing the earthly "Son of Man" as the real resident of "the heavens" and on the other, wresting the authority of that "space" for a new kingdom.[88]

The hope in offering a "first level" Marxist reading of the story of Caesar's coin is that the dominant hold on its interpretation might be subverted. This must be done in unmitigated acknowledgement of history's parade of church leadership complicit in economic and political abrogation and exploitative control of reproducing the means of production.[89] Most critically, its mirrored and mirroring ideology is the conformative monetarisation of Jesus' death as an atonement for debt,[90] which is not quite the same as Mark 10:45 *provided* that the logion is not removed from its context of instruction to the disciples about *their* practice. In isolation, this Markan text becomes subject to the same criticism as applies to later church Christology and soteriology.

The image and inscription of *Jesus* became impressed on imperial coins under Justinian in the sixth century. The question thus hanging over the reception-history of the story of Caesar's coin, is whether Mark's own act of textualisation, Mark's own involvement in "inscription", actually or potentially allies the gospel with the very object of criticism in the story;[91] and indeed, whether the writing about Mark's inscription attempted here, embroiled as it is in the movements and locations of the histories mentioned, can or should be inured against the same critical judgment. But these questions require other levels of Marxist analysis.

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[88] Bloch, *Atheism*, pp. 163-164, 215, 233, 253.

[89] See Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*.

[90] Note Bloch's savage and brilliant critique of substitutionary atonement theory as an ideological defence of monetary exchange value, and hence of the class-ridden economic structures of society: *Man on his Own*, p. 187; *Atheism in Christianity*, pp. 171-178.

[91] This must address the issue of the original form and circumstances of the story and the cost of obliqueness in Mark's construction, not least the problematic choice of ἀποδίδωμι in v.17.

Abstract

The intricate connection between inscription, place and economics in the ancient world is carefully carved in the debate over the payment of taxes to Caesar. The application of a Marxist reading strategy that draws on historical and spatial materialism not only opens up the complex interplay of location, denarius and monetary legend in the story but also raises important questions about the incorporation of this story into further inscribed forms. Mark and Marx enter into a sustained dialogue about the ability of inscription to subvert religio-political power.