

Authority as Spirit-Agency: Reconsidering the ἐξουσία in Mk 2:1-12

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Abstract

This article reexamines the meaning and narrative function of ἐξουσία in Mark 2:1–12 by situating it within the Markan prologue and the Gospel's early conflict scenes. While scholarship commonly interprets Jesus' authority as a divine endowment grounded in his unique relationship to God, this study argues that Mark intentionally presents Jesus' ἐξουσία as exercised through spirit-agency—that is, through the enabling presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. A narratological analysis shows that the prologue (1:9–13) equips the reader with privileged insight into Jesus' identity as Spirit-bearer, shaping expectations for how his authority will manifest. The subsequent exorcism in Capernaum (1:21–28) further associates Jesus' authoritative teaching and dominion over unclean spirits with his Spirit-endowment, particularly through the demon's recognition of him as the "Holy One of God." Against this backdrop, the healing of the paralytic demonstrates not only Jesus' authoritative speech in forgiving sins but also his Spirit-enabled insight into hidden human dispositions. His perception of both faith and internal skepticism functions as the narrative's initial manifestation of ἐξουσία, preceding and grounding the visible healing. Thus, Mark portrays Jesus' authority as inseparable from the Spirit's empowering presence—not only as a source of miraculous power but also as a mediator of supernatural knowledge. This reading contributes to Markan pneumatology by highlighting the Spirit's role in Jesus' discernment, anticipates later applications of spirit-agency to the disciples (e.g., Mark 13:11), and suggests broader implications for understanding the integration of Christology and Pneumatology in the Gospel.

Keywords: Gospel of Mark, Pneumatology, Narratology, ἐξουσία (Authority), spirit-agency

1. Introduction

Anyone who reads the Gospel of Mark encounters a powerful Jesus — one who, by his word, casts out demons, heals diseases, forgives sins, and calms a storm. To describe this authority, the evangelist repeatedly employs the term ἐξουσία, which scholars widely recognized for its “narrative importance [...] for Mark’s Gospel.”¹ Various studies have shown that the exercise of ἐξουσία carries significant implications for the christological and anthropological dimensions of the Gospel, intersecting closely with its major narrative themes.² In this regard, most interpreters rightly adhere that Jesus’ ἐξουσία in Mark is the God-given power through which he performs miracles. With particular reference to the ἐξουσία to forgive sins in Mark 2:10, it is commonly affirmed that this ἐξουσία is “granted by God”³ and grounded in Jesus’

¹ Judith König, “Exousia and Conflict in the Gospel of Mark,” *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): 1; cf. Klaus Scholtissek, *Vollmacht im Alten Testament und Judentum: Begriffs- und motivgeschichtliche Studien zu einem bibeltheologischen Thema (mit einem Ausblick auf das Neue Testament)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993); Anne Dawson, *Freedom as Liberating Power: A Socio-Political Reading of the ἐξουσία Texts in the Gospel of Mark* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Wolfgang Beilner, “Vollmacht,” in *Bibeltheologisches Wörterbuch*, 4th ed. (Graz, Wien, and Köln: Styria, 1994), 570–73; Otto Betz, “ἐξουσία,” in *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*, 3rd ed. (Witten: Brockhaus, 2014), 1184–88; Werner Foerster, “ἐξουσία,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990); Michael R. Whinton, “Questioning the Questions around Jesus’s Authority in Mark 11:27–33: A Performance Perspective,” *Religions* 14 (2023): 972; Aubrey W. Argyle, “The Meaning of Exousia in Mark 1:22,27,” *Expository Times* 80 (1969): 343; Aubrey W. Argyle, “Person and Deed. Jesus and the Storm-Tossed Sea,” *Interpretation* 16, no. 2 (1962): 169–79, 172.

² König, “Exousia and Conflict in the Gospel of Mark”; Whinton, “Questioning the Questions around Jesus’s Authority in Mark 11:27–33.”

³ Saskia Breuer, *Die Wundererzählungen im Markusevangelium: Eine narratologische Analyse zur Erschließung eines soteriologischen Erzählprinzips*, 1st ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024) 205 [my translation]. That God is regarded as the source and giver of the ἐξουσία reflects the position of current scholarship (Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34A (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 90–91; Alexander Weihs, “Jesus, der Herzenskenner:

sonship.⁴ Building on the scholarly consensus that Jesus' authority derives from God, this paper examines whether the intended reader is meant to understand ἐξουσία in Mark 2:10 as given by God and *enabled through the Spirit* (spirit-agency).⁵ I will argue that, based on the information conveyed in Mark 1:9–13 and 1:21–28 about Jesus and his ἐξουσία, the reader is intended to understand Jesus' insight into human hearts and his authority to forgive sins as part of spirit-agency. Thus, the account Mark 2:1–12 not only informs the Christology and Anthropology of the Gospel, but also bears implications regarding the Pneumatology.

I begin with the markan prologue, which gives the reader a knowledge advantage shaping the subsequent narrative. Focusing on the baptism (1:9–11) and temptation (1:12–13) scenes, Jesus is presented as a Spirit-bearer, priming readers to anticipate demonstrations of divine power and insight. The temptation scene further encourages the perception of Jesus as driven by the Spirit.

After this, I consider the first conflict episode (1:21–28) and show that his words and actions are presented as part of his ἐξουσία. Within the narrative, the address of the unclean spirit directs the reader's attention to Jesus' reception of the Spirit in the baptism scene. Consequently, the reader, given his knowledge advantage, is able to attribute the question of authority to spirit-agency in a way that the crowd cannot.

On the basis of these observations, I then turn to Mark 2:1–12 and argue that, in light of the information provided about Jesus and his ἐξουσία up to this point, the healing of the paralytic shows that not only his words and actions are to be understood as expressions of his ἐξουσία, but also his knowledge of the unseen functions both as a prerequisite for and as the initial manifestation of ἐξουσία and are meant to be associated by the reader as part of spirit-agency.

Die καρδία-Motivik als Schlüssel zum Verständnis von Mk 2,1–12," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 62 (2018):59; König, "Exousia and Conflict in the Gospel of Mark," 5.

⁴ Weihs, "Jesus, der Herzenskenner," 51; Michael Whinton refers in a same manner to the Authority in Mk 11:27-33, cf. Whinton, "Questioning the Questions around Jesus's Authority in Mark 11:27–33," 7.

⁵ By spirit-agency I refer to the involvement of the Spirit in leading and empowering Jesus through the course of the gospel narrative.

The following premises guide this study: It approaches the Gospel of Mark as a coherent narrative composition and therefore analyzes the selected passage according to narratological criteria.⁶ Particular attention is devoted to linguistic features, narrative perspective, the characterization and constellation of characters, the construction and function of space and setting, as well as the placement of a given episode within the broader narrative framework with particular attention to the trajectory and function of the term ἐξουσία as it unfolds in the first chapters of the Gospel.

2. Jesus and Spirit-Agency in the Prologue (1:9–13)

2.1. Prologue as necessary prerequisite

First, it should be noted that the prologue has a programmatic function for the remainder of the narrative and is therefore a suitable starting point for our considerations. The significance of the beginning for understanding the Gospel of Mark has long been a subject of discussion.⁷ As many scholars

⁶ For methodology, see Elizabeth Shively, “Intentionality and Narrative Worldmaking in the Gospel of Mark: Rethinking Narrative Communication,” in *Reading the Gospel of Mark in the Twenty-First Century: Method and Meaning*, ed. Geert van Oyen (Leuven, Paris, and Bristol: Peeters, 2019), 343–94; Jan Runggemeier and Elizabeth Shively, “Towards a Cognitive Theory of New Testament Characters: Methodology, Problems, and Desiderata,” *Biblical Interpretation* 29 (2021): 403–29; Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese: Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

⁷ This is evident, for instance, in the fact that the role of the beginning in the overall understanding of the Gospel is still being debated today. For an initial overview, see Frank J. Matera, “The Prologue as the Interpretative Key to Mark’s Gospel,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 11, no. 34 (1988); M. E. Boring, ed., *Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel* 52 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1991); Hans-Josef Klauck, *Vorspiel im Himmel? Erzähltechnik und Theologie im Markusprolog*, Biblisch-theologische Studien 32 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1997); Christian Rose, *Theologie als Erzählung im Markusevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Francesco Filannino, *The Theological Programme of Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021); W.

recognize, the beginning of the narrative has “a” – if not “the” – decisive influence on how readers are guided through the rest of the text, as it sets the framework for the content and provides background information that usually remains hidden from the characters in the narrative world.⁸ This is not only evident by the content, but also by the selection of characters. Interestingly the prologue introduces, besides Jesus, not the three character groups that appear most frequently in the rest of the gospel – namely the disciples, the crowd or different opponents of Jesus. Rather, in the first and, above all, seminal section of the Gospel of Mark, special attention is given to characters who hardly appear in the rest of the narrative. This applies not only to God, Satan, and John the Baptist, but also to the Spirit.⁹ One explanation for this unusual cast of characters seems to lie in the function of the prologue. If the prologue were intended to introduce the characters that readers encounter in the course of the Gospel, then in addition to Jesus, it would also have had to mention the disciples, the crowds, the Pharisees, and the scribes. In the context of the overall narrative, however, it becomes clear that the prologue has a different thrust – the fact that both the characters and the communication of heavenly knowledge in the sense of divine (self-)revelation (cf. 1:9–11) hardly appear

Feneberg, *Der Markusprolog. Studien zur Formbestimmung des Evangeliums*, Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (Kösel: Kösel-Verlag, 1974).

⁸ In the prologue of the Gospel of Mark, the reader undergoes what Klauck calls an “initiation into the mystery” (Klauck, *Vorspiel im Himmel?*, 113–114) [*my translation*]. The audience thus has the privilege of following the narrative from a different vantage point than the characters within the story. Accordingly, Rudolf Pesch maintains that the entire Gospel should be “read in the light of the prologue” (Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium. 1, Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 1, 1–8, 26*, 4th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1984), 139) [*my translation*]. Lührmann reaches a similar conclusion, describing the prologue as the “key to the whole Gospel” (Lührmann, Dieter. *Das Markusevangelium*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987, 32) [*my translation*]. See also Hallur Mortensen, *The Baptismal Episode as Trinitarian Narrative: Proto-Trinitarian Structures in Mark’s Conception of God*, 1st ed., vol. 535 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 58.

⁹ For the unusual constellation of characters, see Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, 1–8 (1st ed.; New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 137; cf. Elizabeth E. Shively, “Characterizing the Non-Human: Satan in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Christopher Skinner and Matthew Hauge, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2014) 128–135.

in the further course of the narrative indicates that the audience is not to be taught something that they will learn in the course of the narrative anyway. Rather, they are to learn what is not discussed much in the rest of the narrative but is important for understanding the Gospel.¹⁰ Therefore, in accordance with its narrative strategy, the beginning of the narrative has a significant relevance for guiding the readership by providing them with background information that usually remains hidden from the characters in the narrated world. The prologue thus provides the crucial prerequisite that readers need in order to understand what follows. Given this guiding function, it is notable that the Spirit appears three times—a striking feature in light of the subsequent narrative. As Reinhard Feldmeier observes, “according to the mentions of the Spirit in 1:8, 10, and 12, it would be inconceivable that the Holy Spirit would not play an important role in Mark’s account of Jesus.”¹¹ Beyond the Baptist’s announcement that the coming one will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ,¹² both the baptism and temptation scenes underscore the Spirit’s central role.

Based on this guiding function of the prologue, we now turn to two passages within it in detail – the Baptism account (1:9–11) and the Temptation scene (1:12–13) – and examine the information they convey to the reader regarding Jesus, the spirit and the influence that the Spirit has over Jesus.

¹⁰ Emmanuel L. Rehfeld, *Sündlos solidarisch: Der Sohn Gottes als Repräsentant der Menschheit nach der Darstellung des Markusevangeliums* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2024), 117; Dennis E. Smith, “Narrative Beginnings in Ancient Literature and Theory,” *Semeia* 52 (1991): 4; Stefan Alkier, “Das Markusevangelium als Tragikomödie lesen,” in *Modern and Ancient Literary Criticism of the Gospels: Continuing the Debate on Gospel Genre(s)*, ed. Robert Calhoun, David Moessner, and Tobias Nicklas (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 219–42; Gilbert Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy*, 1st ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

¹¹ Reinhard Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist: Die biblische Rede vom Geist im Kontext der antiken Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 144. That this, however, fits well within Mark’s narrative structure is already demonstrated by Klauck, *Vorspiel im Himmel?*, 40–46.

¹² For the textual-critical question of how the Marcan account of baptism ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί relates to the Synoptics (Mt 3:11, Lk 3:16) and the meaning of the baptism, see Guelich, *Mark 1–8*:26, 27–28. For present purposes, v. 8 can be set aside, though it marks the first reference to a Spirit-agency further developed in the narrative.

2.2. The Baptism Account (1:9–11)

In the Baptism account the reader witnesses the Spirit descending εἰς αὐτόν. The following two observations can be made, among others. (1) From the narrative perspective, the characterization of Jesus as Spirit-bearer is accessible primarily to the reader rather than to the characters within the narrated world. (2) The allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures suggest potential courses of action in the subsequent narrative that the readers can anticipate from Jesus on the basis of his identification as a Spirit-bearer.

The reader is presented with the information that the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended into Jesus (εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανούς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν). The narrative perspective chosen here presents the event from Jesus' point of view, as indicated by the main verb εἶδεν and the accompanying participles ἀναβαίνων, σχιζομένους, and καταβαῖνον. Unlike in the other Synoptic Gospels,¹³ all apocalyptic aspects associated with the baptism (opening of the heavens, descent of the Spirit, and the voice from heaven) are disclosed to the characters within the narrated world and reported solely to the reader. At this point, the fact that Jesus bears the Spirit is known only to Jesus himself, the narrator, and the reader—a knowledge advantage that allows the readers not only to follow and evaluate the subsequent narrative from a distinct perspective (see the function of the prologue, 2.1) but explains the astonishment and lack of understanding displayed by the characters as the story unfolds.

How exactly these eschatological concepts are connected to the identity or activity of Jesus, however, remains open at this point in the narrative.¹⁴ The question of how exactly the phrase καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν is to be understood also remains a matter of debate among interpreters. Should be understood as

¹³ Matthew introduces the opening of the heavens with καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν, while the Spirit's descent is conveyed from Jesus' perspective. Luke presents the baptismal event more openly. The opening of the heavens, the Spirit's descent, and the heavenly voice are expressed with aorist infinitives (ἀνεφύχθῃναι, καταβῆναι, γενέσθαι).

¹⁴ Despite references to ancient Jewish concepts, the prologue and baptism scene remain open and ambiguous. Interpretations that narrow meaning are unnecessary; the text guides the reader toward understanding Jesus as Kyrios and messianic servant.

“towards him,” “upon him,” or, more literally, “into him”?¹⁵ And furthermore: what exactly is meant by this interpretation on the level of the narrative or the events themselves?¹⁶ Given the grammatical and semantic range that the preposition εἰς with an accusative object can convey, caution is warranted, in my view, “before drawing far-reaching conclusions from a single use of such a common and versatile preposition.”¹⁷ Further insight into how the facts that the spirits descends εἰς αὐτόν emerges not only from the preposition itself but also from knowledge of the reader that the description of the baptism account evokes.

It has been noted repeatedly that the baptism scene draws on multiple Old Testament motifs.¹⁸ In addition to numerous texts that are alluded to through verbal connections and symbolism, as many scholars observe, it especially evokes “the messianic king (Isa 11:1-5), the Servant (42:1-4) and the figure of 61:1-3.”¹⁹ Notwithstanding that there are multiple allusions possible, one could still speak of „a common thread that links them all together: the theme of the coming of YHWH himself or of his Spirit-carrying Servant/Messiah.”²⁰

¹⁵ For a more in-depth discussion, which cannot be provided here, see: Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 148–150, Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 159–166, Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus – Studienausgabe*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 52; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁶ The same could be said for the interpretation of ὡς περὶ στερεὰν.

¹⁷ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 78.

¹⁸ Especially in light of the composite quotation in 1:2.3, introduced with καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφῆτῃ, the reader already exposed to elements of the Isaiah proclamation.

¹⁹ Mortensen, *The Baptismal Episode as Trinitarian Narrative*, 210. Vgl. Nathan MacDonald, “The Spirit of YHWH: An Overlooked Conceptualization of Divine Presence in the Persian Period,” in *Divine Presence and Absence in Exilic and Post-Exilic Judaism: Studies of the Sofia Kolalevskaja Research Group on Early Jewish Monotheism*, ed. Nathan MacDonald and Izaak J. de Hulster (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 111.

²⁰ Mortensen, *The Baptismal Episode as Trinitarian Narrative*, 211.

Despite the interpretive openness of the Old Testament references, various character traits and potential courses of action are, at least from the perspective of the reader, projected onto Jesus. For instance, Isaiah 42:1 supports an identification of Jesus as the Servant of God.²¹ Likewise, the vision presented in Isaiah 11:1–6 anticipates powerful actions and the exercise of discernment guided by the Spirit.²²

Based on the baptism scene, readers—especially in light narrative perspective and the allusions to Isaiah 11:1–6—are exclusively aware of Jesus’ identity as Spirit-bearer and can therefore, if his actions later in the narrative display a certain forcefulness or remarkable insight, refer to them as enabled by the Spirit (spirit-agency). How this spirit-agency unfolds is no secret to the reader, but emerges from the subsequent narrative, which leads us to the Temptation scene (1:12–13).

2.3. The Temptation Scene (1:12–13)

Immediately in the following verses, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). As has often been observed, the use of ἐκβάλλει suggests a forceful, even violent action on the part of the Spirit.²³ This extraordinary description, which some commentators have deemed “unnecessarily strong,”²⁴ makes it unmistakably clear that the Spirit exerts control over Jesus. At least within the confines of the Gospel of Mark, this spirit-agency can be compared to that of the unclean spirits. It is therefore hardly surprising that other figures in the narrative world are also thrown by

²¹ Collins, *Mark*, 147–151; Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 49–54.

²² At least the strength of the one to come, as announced by John the Baptist (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός), can probably be understood in the sense of the πνεῦμα βουλῆς καὶ ἰσχύος (Isa 11:2b LXX). With regard to Mark 2:1–12, this is also invoked by Cornelis Bennema (Cornelis Bennema, “The Referent of Πνεῦμα in Mark 2:8 and 8:12 in Light of Early Jewish Traditions: A Study in Markan Anthropology,” *Neotestamentica* 52, no. 1 [2018]: 195–214, 203–204).

²³ Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist*, 144–145.

²⁴ Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 38, cf. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 94; Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 56–57.

spirits (cf. 9:22)²⁵ or empowered beyond their human capacity (cf. 5:2–4). Additionally the observation has been made that some exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark are accompanied by a loud proclamation from the unclean spirit as it departs the person, a pattern that bears a notable resemblance to the moment of Jesus’ death.²⁶ Similarly, the understanding of the Holy Spirit as a speaking entity (cf. Mark 13) highlights a parallel between the Spirit of God and the unclean spirits (1:23–24, 26; 3:11–12; 5:7; 9:25–26).

Regardless of how ancient readers may have interpreted Jesus’ reception of the Spirit, it is evident from the prologue that the Spirit is depicted as an entity that, in a certain sense, exercises power over Jesus and acts upon him. In parallel to the demon-possessed figures in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus can, at least in 1:12, be understood as one being not demon-possessed but possessed by the spirit.²⁷ That such a comparison is not unfounded becomes evident in 1:21–28, where it is no coincidence that Jesus, described as the “Holy One of God,” confronts an unclean spirit. These observations on the baptism and temptation scenes highlight Jesus as a Spirit-driven Son of God. This portrayal shapes the Gospel, as signaled by the prologue and further developed in Mark 1:21–28.

²⁵ Although in Mark 9:14–29 the verb ἐκβάλλω is used solely with reference to the act of expulsion, while the verbs βάλλω, ῥήσσω, and συσπαράσσω express the dominance exercised by the πνεῦμα ἄλαον, the spirit is nevertheless the controlling entity. It disposes of the person in the same way.

²⁶ The cry of Jesus thus bears similarities to the exorcisms, cf.: Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 279–293. That this could be understood, in connection with the baptism passage, as the departure of the Spirit would require more extensive discussion and cannot be fully addressed in this article. For the purposes of the present considerations, it is sufficient to note that such peripheral references are not uncommon in the Gospel of Mark – one may think of the tearing of the heavens and the temple curtain (1:10; 15:38), the opening words in 1:1 Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ (even though υἱοῦ θεοῦ is text-critically disputed) and the centurion (15:39), as well as the reference back to Galilee (16:7).

²⁷ Whether Mark’s Jesus can be regarded, in Feldmeier’s terms, as a fully “rapt charismatic” (Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist*, 145) [my translation] remains open to debate, especially in light of the frequent absence of the Spirit in the narrative. Nevertheless, in view of the prologue—and in particular verse 10—it is quite fitting to characterize him as a “driven Son of God” (cf. Feldmeier, *Gottes Geist*, 143–48).

3. First Conflict Episode (1:21–28)

Mark 1:21–28 portrays Jesus as a character with ἐξουσία.²⁸ The narrative structure and the demon's direct speech indicate (1) that Jesus' teaching and actions belong to ἐξουσία and (2) that his dominance over the unclean spirit can be attributed to Identity as Spirit-Bearer.

In this scene, Jesus enters Capernaum with his disciples and begins to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The audience is astonished at his instruction, for he teaches as one having authority, and not as the scribes (ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς). Traditionally, this ἐξουσία has been interpreted primarily with reference to Jesus' teaching ability—an observation evident by v. 22.²⁹ Yet such a view presupposes a conceptual separation between Jesus' teaching activity and his exorcistic actions. Furthermore, the phrasing ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων does not yet characterize Jesus as one who has demonstrated his authority. The actual display of his authoritative teaching emerges through the events in 1:21–28 as a whole.³⁰

In this pericope, Mark presents teaching and exorcism not as separate spheres but as expressions of the same authoritative ministry. Narratologically, the narrative directs attention precisely to the “information gap”—the absence of the content of Jesus' teaching. One is compelled to wonder what Jesus could have said to provoke such astonishment. The story answers this through the exorcism of an unclean spirit (1:23–26), where Jesus acts without ritual or

²⁸ In a similar, albeit more attenuated sense, the first public confrontation also has a paradigmatic character, cf.: Strecker, “Mächtig in Wort und Tat (Exorcismus in Kafarnaum) Mk 1,21–28,” in *Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen*, Bd. 1: *Die Wunder Jesu*, ed. R. Zimmermann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), 205–13.

²⁹ Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 56; Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 79; Collins, *Mark*, 164–165; Stein Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 85–87; Peter Dschulnigg, *Das Markusevangelium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), 79. The plausibility of such an interpretation is suggested by the syntactically following καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς.

³⁰ Breuer, *Die Wundererzählungen im Markusevangelium*, 149. For the discussion on ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων, cf. David Daube, “Ἐξουσία in Mark 1:22 and 27,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1938): 45–59, against Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 56.

physical aids—the decisive factor is his word alone. The crowd’s reaction links teaching and authority: after witnessing the exorcism, they marvel, “What is this? A new teaching with authority!” (1:27), which also refers to the exorcism as διδασχῇ, forming an inclusio with v. 22. The narrative thus conveys a strong continuity between teaching and exorcism: Jesus’ word confronts demonic powers, and his exorcisms enact that authority. The narrative sequence “conveys the distinct impression of a strong continuity, if not identity, between the teaching and the expulsion of demons.”³¹ In other words, Jesus’ teaching functions as a confrontation with demonic powers, and his exorcisms are carried out through his authoritative word.³²

The precise nature of this authority, however, remains uncertain; it is neither viewed uniformly among modern scholars³³ nor is it likely to be understood by the ancient audience at this point in the narrative. Indications of the source of Jesus’ authority, however, seem to emerge through the responses of the narrative characters. Notably, the unclean spirit identifies Jesus as ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ.³⁴ These words reveal not only that the demon possesses “special knowledge, concealed from the human beings who surround Jesus,”³⁵ but also fit well within the overall portrayal of non-human figures in the Gospel of

³¹ Brendan Byrne, “The Qumran Melchizedek Scroll and the Gospel of Mark: Coherence and Contrast in Soteriology,” *Pacifica* 27, no. 2 (2014): 135.

³² This argument is also found in Ruben Bühner, “Verkündigung und Befreiung. Jesu Exorzismen im Markusevangelium im Kontext der Auseinandersetzung messianischer Gestalten mit himmlischen Gegenspielern,” in *Qumran and New Testament*, ed. Jörg Frey, BETL (Leuven: Peeters, 2024), 341–57. Bühner further demonstrates, using the example of 11QMelch, that the depiction of teaching and exorcism as two aspects of Jesus’ activity aligns with concepts in ancient Judaism. Cf. also Strecker, *Mächtig in Wort und Tat*, 207.

³³ Whether ἐξουσία here denotes a divine prerogative, a unity of will with the Father or simply indicates that Jesus is “brought into special proximity to God” (Breuer, *Die Wundererzählungen im Markusevangelium*, 150) remains debated.

³⁴ Although, according to vv. 23–24, the human being speaks (ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ καὶ ἀνέκραξεν λέγων), it is clear from the broader context—and especially in light of the commands to silence and to come out—that the unclean spirit is to be understood as the true source of the words.

³⁵ Marcus, *Mark*, 192.

Mark who are aware of Jesus' true identity.³⁶ In addition to the apocalyptic texts alluded to in this address,³⁷ the audience is directed back to the reception of the Spirit through the perspective of the demon. Moreover, the character constellation sets up a contrast between one possessed by an unclean spirit and one empowered by the Spirit of God.³⁸ The questions regarding what has taken place there and what kind of authoritative teaching is being offered, which even demons heed, can be answered by the attentive audience—in contrast to the astonished crowd—and related to the identity of Jesus in connection with his spirit-agency. As Joel Marcus summarizes „Jesus is God's holy one, and therefore able to conquer the unclean spirits, because he himself possesses God's Spirit, the power of the new age.“³⁹ Thus, while the precise nature of Jesus' ἐξουσία remains open to interpretation, the text—considering the structure and characters perspective—suggests that Jesus' authority derives from his endowment with the Spirit.

It can thus be noted that, up to this point, the reader has encountered a powerful Jesus who operates under a certain influence of the Spirit. Furthermore, the reader is invited, through various character perspectives, to evaluate Jesus' identity and to attribute his authority to the reception of the

³⁶ Shivley, Shively, “Characterizing the Non-Human”, 136–150; cf. Jan Runggemeier, *Poetik der markinischen Christologie: Eine kognitiv-narratologische Exegese*, 1st ed., Bd. 458 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 241–248.

³⁷ See 2 Ki. 4:9; Ps. 106:16; 1Q30; 1QM 1:16; 3:5; 6:6; 1QS 4:18–23; T. Levi. 18:6–12. For a detailed discussion of the designation ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ in the context of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism, see: Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 122; Bastiaan van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, 1st ed., vol. 164 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 104–105; cf. Scholtissek, *Vollmacht im Alten Testament und Judentum*, 112; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 104. Some commentators have considered whether, in analogy to Samson (cf. Judg 16:17), the address as Ναζαρηνέ could be understood as synonymous with ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (Dschulnigg, *Das Markusevangelium*, 81). If so, this could also be seen as an indication that Jesus' powerful actions are linked to the reception of the Spirit.

³⁸ A character constellation that can also be interpreted as such based on the prologue: “Moreover, in proximity to the prologue, this account is striking in its juxtaposition of the ‘unclean spirit’ which possesses the man (ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι, v. 23) with the Holy Spirit who has just possessed Jesus (v. 8).” (Shively, „Characterizing the Non-Human: Satan in the Gospel of Mark“, 140), cf. van Iersel, *Mark*, 104–105.

³⁹ Marcus, *Mark*, 193.

Spirit. As will be demonstrated, assuming the established character conception, the narrative builds upon and further develops the image of the Spirit-empowered exorcist.⁴⁰

4. Ἐξουσία in Mark 2:1-12 as Spirit-Agency

Given the information regarding Jesus and his ἐξουσία so far, the reader (1) is intended to see not only the words and actions of Jesus as both part of the ἐξουσία, but also his knowledge of what is unseen, which (2) is presented as the prerequisite and the first manifestation of his ἐξουσία and (3) can be attributed to spirit-agency

The narrative establishes a link to both the exorcism and healing accounts in Mark 1:21–34, suggested by the geographical reference and Jesus’ teaching activity. The Markan Jesus once again finds himself in Capernaum (πάλιν εἰς Καφαρναούμ).⁴¹ Through the narrative shaping of the setting, both Jesus and the readers are brought back to the place where he has already demonstrated his ἐξουσία in a comparable manner. On a content level as well, the act of speaking the word (ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον) complements the ἐδίδασκεν of Mark 1:21. As in the exorcism narrative, the teaching in Mark 2:1–12 is not elaborated further but is supplemented by the subsequent word of forgiveness and healing. This close connection between authoritative speech and authoritative action—similar to Mark 1:21–28 – is indicated through the

⁴⁰ From the readers’ perspective this initial characterization is decisive and was grasped narratologically by the concept of the categorization effect: “Once the recipient has assigned a character to a particular category (in the broadest sense), they tend to continue to classify that character within the same category, even in the face of contradictory signals” (Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese*, 136).

⁴¹ The reader’s reliance on prior knowledge is highlighted by the missing subject: Jesus is assumed as known. The reference to his return (πάλιν) to Capernaum connects to earlier events. While it is uncertain if this is the house introduced in 1:29–31, readers can reasonably fill in the gap from their existing knowledge. With Breuer, *Die Wundererzählungen im Markusevangelium*, 192–193; Paul-Gerhard Klumbies, “Die Heilung eines Gelähmten und vieler Erstarter (Die Heilung eines Gelähmten) – Mk 2,1–12 (Mt 9,1–8; EvNik 6),” in *Die Wunder Jesu*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), 235–236).

intertwining of Jesus' words and his miracle.⁴² Not only does Jesus appear as the sole speaker, but he also underscores through his question to the scribes in v. 9 that neither the declaration ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι nor the command ἔγειρε καὶ ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει can be uttered effectively apart from the possession of authority. Accordingly, teaching and action are again closely integrated and “must be considered together, because both are linked to Jesus' authority (Mark 1:27).”⁴³ In contrast to 1:21–28, the reader gains insight into Jesus' inner perception, which, as will become apparent, is also connected to his ἐξουσία.

The “seeing of their faith” (ιδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν) precedes the declaration of forgiveness. In accordance with other healing narratives in the Gospel of Mark, one may assume here as well that faith not only precedes the healing but also initiates it (e.g., 5:34, 36; 9:23–24; 10:52).⁴⁴ Yet the question remains: what kind of faith is meant in this context? Is it “the faith of the others”⁴⁵ that effects the healing of the paralytic, or is the paralytic's own faith also implied? Their willingness to overcome obstacles⁴⁶ makes their faith manifest—visible both to all present and to Jesus. According to this line of interpretation, the “seeing” of faith refers primarily to its observable dimension.⁴⁷ Moreover, other passages in Mark likewise depict situations in which the faith of persons other than the one being healed plays a decisive role (5:21–24, 35–43; 7:24–30; 9:14–27). In any case, it is uncontested that τὴν

⁴² Forgiveness and healing are linked because, in the ancient worldview, physical disability also reflected one's spiritual state (Klumbies, “Die Heilung eines Gelähmten,” 236).

⁴³ Breuer, *Die Wundererzählungen im Markusevangelium*, 194–195.

⁴⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 124; vgl. Auch Collins, *Mark*, 185; Marcus, *Mark*, 220.

⁴⁵ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 62; cf. Breuer, *Die Wundererzählungen im Markusevangelium*, 197.

⁴⁶ Their actions, which imply faith in every sense, are described in vv. 3–4. Carrying the paralytic (αἰρούμενον ὑπὸ τεσσάρων) and removing the roof (ἀπεστέγασαν τὴν στέγην), with all the expected consequences, exemplify faith expressed through loving action for another.

⁴⁷ Donahue/Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 62; Klumbies, “Die Heilung eines Gelähmten,” 236; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 123–125.

πίστιν αὐτῶν refers at minimum to the faith of the men carrying the paralytic.

However, the text provides sufficient reason not to limit the faith described here exclusively to the four carrying the paralytic. Despite the account's emphasis on their extraordinary actions (vv. 3–4)—actions that certainly express faith—Jesus immediately addresses the paralyzed man himself (v. 5b). Unlike the four, who disappear from the narrative at this point, it is the paralytic who receives the command in v. 11 and obeys it without hesitation.⁴⁸ Furthermore, comparison with other healing accounts in the Markan narrative does not, in my view, provide adequate grounds for restricting the faith solely to the four. On the contrary, such comparisons suggest the opposite. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, even when the faith of others is noted, the afflicted person's own need and trust are also presupposed (5:34; 10:52).⁴⁹ Moreover, this passage is not primarily concerned with healing but with the forgiveness of sins, which makes it even less likely that no personal trust on the part of the paralytic is assumed.⁵⁰

If the paralytic's faith is included in τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν, Jesus' ability to perceive beyond what is visibly apparent is already evident in v. 5. Whereas the faith of the four is discernible to Jesus and the other characters through their visible actions, this does not apply to the paralytic, who remains passive until v. 12.⁵¹ Therefore, a significant point emerges regarding the relationship

⁴⁸ Something that likewise indicates trusting faith. Cf. Weihs, "Jesus, der Herzenskenner," 42; with Morna D. Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 1st ed. (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001), 88; C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 87; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 124.

⁴⁹ The same is also true in the other Synoptics: Mt 8:10; 9:29; Lk 7:9, 50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42. Cf. Chong-Hyon Sung, *Vergebung der Sünden Jesu: Praxis der Sündenvergebung nach den Synoptikern und ihre Voraussetzungen im Alten Testament und frühen Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 217.

⁵⁰ Weihs, "Jesus, der Herzenskenner," 42; Jarmo Kiilunen, *Die Vollmacht im Widerstreit: Untersuchungen zum Werdegang von Mk 2,1–3,6* (Helsinki: Suomen Tiedeakatemia, 1985), 104–105.

⁵¹ Renate Maria Fink, *Die Botschaft des heilenden Handelns Jesu: Untersuchung der dreizehn exemplarischen Berichte von Jesu heilendem Handeln im Markusevangelium* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2000), 52; 241; Weihs, "Jesus, der Herzenskenner," 43.

between Jesus' knowledge of the heart and his authority to forgive sins: the capacity to see beyond the visible is not applied solely to the inner deliberations of the scribes (vv. 6–8) but is already operative in Jesus' perception of the paralytic's faith. In the same way, the invisible yet divinely perceived faith of the paralytic constitutes—analogous to the visible faith of the four—the necessary precondition for the forgiveness of sins to which Jesus' ἐξουσία refers. Jesus is therefore presented to the reader not only as one before whom both faith and unbelief are transparent, but also as the one who, on the basis of such knowledge, exercises genuine and effective authority in the sphere of the forgiveness of sins.

The connection between authoritative forgiveness of sins and insight into the invisible continues in the subsequent narrative. Seeing their faith, Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven (v. 5). The *passivum divinum* (τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι), regarding the aoristic-present tense, conveys Jesus' assurance of a forgiveness already realized. He thus appears not merely as a messenger announcing divine pardon but as one who speaks in God's place, or with binding authority on God's behalf. That such an act constitutes blasphemy aligns with the conceptions of ancient Judaism,⁵² yet this becomes evident to the reader at least through the inner deliberations of the scribes (τί οὗτος οὕτως λαλεῖ; βλασφημεῖ· τίς δύναται ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός;). Importantly, the knowledge of the scribes' inner thoughts is not restricted to the reader alone: Jesus himself, “in his spirit” (τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ), perceives the thoughts of his opponents.

Many interpreters understand the expression τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ as referring to a human mental movement or intuition of Jesus. The main reasons for this interpretation are Old Testament parallels (cf. Ps 77:6), which might suggest an anthropological reading⁵³ and the use of the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ.⁵⁴ While the citation of individual Old Testament poetic texts as evidence must

⁵² Weihs, “Jesus, der Herzenskenner,” 49; G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 535; J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 100; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 87; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 126; P. Dschulnigg, *Das Markusevangelium*, 93.

⁵³ A text cited in this context by Marcus, *Mark*, 217.

⁵⁴ E.g., Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 88.

be approached with caution due to their different genre and linguistic distance, the presence of the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ allows one to reasonably assume that Mark 2:8 points to a human impression experienced by Jesus.

Nevertheless, sufficient arguments have been made against a solely anthropological interpretation of τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ.⁵⁵ The idea that the presence of a divine spirit resonates in Mark 2:8 is not only possible but, in light of the complex spirit-conceptions of ancient Judaism, the Markan use of πνεῦμα in relation to cognate terms (καρδία, ψυχή, σάρξ, σῶμα), and the narrative development up to this point, highly probable. This conclusion is further supported by a close examination of occurrences of πνεῦμα with a genitive pronoun in the LXX and other Jewish writings. According to Cornelis Bennema in the LXX such constructions fall into two overlapping categories: (1) references to human life or vitality, which ultimately derive from God's own life-giving spirit,⁵⁶ and (2) references to inner human states, such as emotions, cognition, and volition.⁵⁷ Yet in both categories the so-called "human spirit" is portrayed not as an independent metaphysical component but as the effect or extension of God's own spirit, which animates and shapes human life (Gen 2:7; Zech 12:1; Wis 15:11; Job 32:8; Dan 5:20–23).⁵⁸ This understanding continues in other Jewish writings: πνεῦμα with a genitive pronoun denotes either human vitality or emotional states (e.g., T. Gad 5.9; T. Jos. 7.2; T. Ab. 17.3, 19; Josephus, Ant. 11.241) or explicitly reflects the divine Spirit's influence, whether in renewal, wisdom, or life itself (e.g., T. Ab. 18.11; T. Sol. 26.6–7; Jos. Asen. 19.10–11; Apoc. Mos. 31.4; 42.8; Philo, Gig. 1.24, 26). Even Qumran traditions, though complex, describe human interiority as shaped by God-given spirits rather than by an autonomous human pneuma

⁵⁵ Primarily Cornelis Bennema, "The Referent of Πνεῦμα in Mark 2:8 and 8:12 in Light of Early Jewish Traditions," 195–214; cf. also France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 126–127; Collins, *Mark*, 186.

⁵⁶ Cf. Gen 45:27; Judg 15:19; 1 Sam 30:12; Job 7:15; 10:12; 12:10; Pss 30:6; 75:13; 103:29–30; 141:4; 142:7; Eccl 3:21; Isa 38:12; Dan 5:4, 23; Tob 3:6; Sir 38:23; Bar 2:17.

⁵⁷ Cf. Judg 8:3; 2 Sam 13:21, 39; 1 Kgs 20:4–5; 1 Chr 5:26; Ezra 1:1, 5; Pss 76:4; 77:8; 105:33; 142:4; Eccl 7:9; Isa 26:9; Ezek 3:14; Dan 2:1, 3; 7:15; Mal 2:15–16.

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion of this categories cf. Bennema, "The Referent of Πνεῦμα in Mark 2:8 and 8:12 in Light of Early Jewish Traditions," 197–202.

(1QS 3–4). Thus, across these sources, the “human spirit” consistently appears as a derivative, God-given principle, not a self-standing metaphysical entity.⁵⁹

If, in the context of Second Temple Judaism, it can be assumed that “πνεῦμα is always closely associated with the divine, even when thought of as belonging to man,”⁶⁰ one must still ask whether the Gospel of Mark as a whole, and particularly Mark 2:8, supports such an understanding. It should first be noted that Mark also employs other terms for inner human impulses,⁶¹ whereas πνεῦμα, except for three ambiguous occurrences, often refers to non-human spirits.⁶² This does not imply, however, that Mark follows a fixed conceptual schema in this regard—due to the considerable overlap in meanings, this cannot be stated with certainty. It does show, however, that in Mark, at least with respect to the use of πνεῦμα, there is a discernible tendency to refer not to purely human phenomena but to non-human entities that are connected to humans and affect them.⁶³

Furthermore, the preceding narrative flow, as well as the characterization of Jesus, suggests that his abilities and authority are to be traced to his

⁵⁹ Bennema “The Referent of Πνεῦμα in Mark 2:8 and 8:12 in Light of Early Jewish Traditions,” 202.

⁶⁰ Marie E. Isaacs, *The Concept of Spirit: A Study of Pneuma in Hellenistic Judaism and Its Bearing on the New Testament* (London: Heythrop College, 1976), 59–64. Although this general judgment can certainly be questioned with regard to its absoluteness.

⁶¹ Besides πνεῦμα, Mark uses four key terms to describe aspects of a person. Καρδία denotes the center of thought or reasoning (2:6, 8; 3:5; 6:52; 7:19, 21; 8:17; 11:23) or the inner self (7:6; 12:30, 33). Ψυχή can refer to physical life (3:4; 8:35–37; 10:45) or emotional life (12:30; 14:34). Σῶμα denotes the physical body (5:29; 14:8, 22; 15:43), while σὰρξ can mean married partners as a unit (10:8) or human frailty (13:20; 14:38). Following early Jewish thought, πνεῦμα is distinct from σὰρξ and σῶμα but interacts with καρδία, ψυχή, and διάνοια, c.f. Bennema, “The Referent of Πνεῦμα in Mark 2:8 and 8:12 in Light of Early Jewish Traditions,” 205–206.

⁶² The uses in 2:8; 8:12; and 14:38 are contested in their interpretation and vary depending on the exegetical approach.

⁶³ Given Mark’s use of πνεῦμα, καρδία, ψυχή, σὰρξ, and σῶμα, καρδία would be the most fitting term for Jesus’ cognitive or intuitive faculties. This, however, does not mean—as noted earlier—that Mark is committed to a rigid classification of these terms.

endowment with the Spirit. As has been demonstrated, Jesus is portrayed as Spirit-driven in the course of the baptism and temptation scenes. Especially given that Isaiah 11 (see section 2.2.) resonates in the baptism scene, where v. 2 speaks of πνεῦμα γνώσεως and πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἰσχύος, readers are likely to attribute Jesus' authoritative actions to his Spirit-given endowment. Moreover, the connection between the healing of the paralytic and the preceding miracles (particularly 1:21–28), as well as the resulting reader expectations, indicates that such a reference to Spirit-endowment is not only plausible for 1:21–28 but also for 2:1–12. In this light, an interpretation of τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ that entirely omits the role of the divine Spirit is insufficient, given the Jewish concepts of Spirit and the broader narrative context. What remains to be clarified, however, is whether—and to what extent—this Spirit-inspired insight is directly connected to Jesus' ἐξουσία, which is explicitly demonstrated in the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the paralytic.

In light of the preceding narrative, the reader—unlike most of the figures within the story world—possesses knowledge of the capacities that the Spirit confers upon Jesus. Furthermore, the reader can attribute Jesus' authoritative teaching and actions in Mark 1:21–28 to his identity as a Spirit-bearer, which also suggests that subsequent references to his ἐξουσία should be evaluated similarly from the reader's perspective.

In the present pericope, this ἐξουσία—although only explicitly addressed in v. 11—manifests itself in the forgiveness of sins, which is pronounced in v. 5 and demonstrated in v. 12. Whether the pronouncement of forgiveness constitutes genuine speech on God's behalf, thereby exercising divine authority, or merely blasphemy, can be assessed differently by the reader, who enjoys a knowledge advantage over the Pharisees. If the reader understands that Jesus has seen the paralytic's faith and accordingly pronounced forgiveness, this serves as an initial indication of his capacity to perceive beyond the visible—a necessary precondition for the truthfulness of his words. The heart-knowledge hinted at in v. 5 and made explicit in v. 6 is thus revealed to the reader alongside the audience, providing an initial answer to the question of Jesus' ἐξουσία. Through the perspectival presentation of Jesus' Spirit-wrought insight into human hearts, the narrative signals—quite pointedly—that he possesses a capacity for heart-knowledge, a capacity otherwise

attributed solely to God.⁶⁴ This first demonstration of ἐξουσία can be traced by the reader—due to their knowledge of Jesus’ identity, the intertextual reference to the previous demonstration of authority, and the allusions to his insight into the invisible—to his Spirit-endowment. Thus, his ἐξουσία is both presupposed and demonstrated through Spirit-wrought knowledge of hearts, before it becomes fully apparent in the healing of the crowd.

5. Theological Reflection

If one follows this reading of Mark 2:1–12 on the basis of the arguments presented, several implications emerge for both the pericope and the broader field of Markan pneumatology.

First the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1–12 has not only christological and anthropological implications but also informs the Markan understanding of the Spirit. Notably, the Spirit, as in Mark 1:21–28, is closely associated with Jesus’ ἐξουσία. Thus, Jesus’ authority is not depicted merely as an intrinsic aspect of his being but is integrally linked to his Spirit-endowment. Second, this authority—unlike in Mark 1:21–28—is also manifested through supernatural insight, which in Mark 2:8 is explicitly attributed to the Spirit. Here, the Spirit assumes a novel function in relation to Jesus’ ἐξουσία: through the Spirit, Jesus is able to perceive more than what is externally visible. The Holy Spirit is not only a source of power in the confrontation with unclean spirits but also a mediator of knowledge in the context of conflict. In this respect, Christology and Pneumatology in Mark, as demonstrated in Mark 2:1–12, are more closely intertwined than has often been assumed.

Against this background, this aspect of spirit-agency provides the foundation for understanding the Spirit as a mediator of knowledge—a function that is revisited later in the Gospel and applied to the disciples in the context of conflict (c.f. Mark 13:11). This insight can further be explored in relation to the overarching narrative of Mark. It remains a fruitful question whether other passages that highlight Jesus’ knowledge of human hearts

⁶⁴ 1 Sam 16:7; 1 Kgs 8:39; 1 Chr 28:9; Ps 7:10; 26:2; 44:22; 139:1–2; Prov 15:11; 17:3; 21:2; 24:12; Sir 42:18–20; Jer 11:20; 17:9–12; 20:12; etc.

similarly point the reader to a form of spirit-agency.

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