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THESES OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

MIRACLE STORIES OF GOSPEL OF MARK IN THE LIGHT OF EARLY CHRISTIAN BAPTISMAL TRADITION

Dissertatio ad Doctoratum

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The basic idea of the doctoral dissertation was taken from Gerhard Lohfink's famous work, *Jesus von Nazareth - was er he wanted wer er We took it from the book war* , in which he mentions the sacred character of Jesus' miracles. Just as the sacramental sign is visible in the sacraments, but the sacramental grace is invisible, similarly in the exorcisms or healings of the sick, the kingdom of God is realized. The visible miracle is therefore a visible sign of the kingdom of God, which is present in a hidden way in the healing process.[1] In this way, a parallel can be recognized between the miracles of Jesus and the sacraments of the church, and developing this idea further, the question arises as to whether there is a parallel or analogy between the very first sacrament, the sacrament of baptism, and the healing miracles. We try to answer this question in the dissertation.

In the canonical ending of Mark's Gospel (cf. Mk 16:9-19), [2]Jesus gives his apostles a universal mission (cf. Mk 16:15: πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει), which also includes the administration of the sacrament of baptism (ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται). Baptism is closely connected with faith and salvation in Mark 16:16. There is no reference to this form of baptism in the earlier parts of the Gospel. There is a reference to John's baptism (cf. Mk 1,4.5.8a), the baptism of Jesus (cf. Mk 1,9) and the baptism in the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 1,8b), but the sacramental baptism practiced in the church does not explicitly appear.

In the dissertation, we want to show that the open reference to baptism at the end of the Gospel (cf. Mk 16:16) has antecedents, because when the evangelist Mark writes about the miracles of Jesus, he uses language and motifs that are connected to the sacrament of baptism in the early Christian tradition. The thesis aims to prove this. The healing narratives also show the influence of the early Christian baptismal tradition. In the first part of the dissertation, we will focus our attention on those New Testament texts - after the presentation of the word baptism - which reflect the early Christian tradition and theologically interpret the effect of Christian baptism, since Mark the evangelist and the readers of his writings lived in the tradition that these texts reflect.

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[1]Cf. LOHFINK , G., *Jesus von Nazaret - was er wanted , was er war* , Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2012, 90. A Hungarian translation of the book is also available: LOHFINK G., *Jesus of Nazareth – What did he want and who was he?* , Bencés Publishing House, Pannonhalma 2017, pp. 74-75.

[2]The original ending of the Gospel was Mk 16.8. cf. SÖDING , T., *Das Gospel nach Marcus* (ThHK 2) , Evangelische Verlagsanstalt , Leipzig 2022, pp. 459-460, 463-464.

In the dissertation, we examined whether the baptismal command has precedents in the canonical text of the Gospel of Mark. We aimed to demonstrate that when the evangelist Mark writes about the miracles of Jesus, he uses language and motifs associated with the sacrament of baptism in early Christian tradition. In the healing miracle narratives we examined, we discovered allusion to early Christian baptismal tradition.

We analyzed the New Testament texts related to baptism to observe what distinctive motifs are present in those texts concerning Christian baptism. The baptismal motifs that can be traced to the miracle stories we studied include: walking in newness of life (cf. Rom 6:4), resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-11; Col 2:12; Eph 5:14), forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 2:38), enlightenment (cf. Eph 5:14), rebirth and renewal (cf. Tit 3:5), washing or purification (cf. 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Tit 3:5), salvation (cf. Tit 3:5; 1Pt 3:21), putting on Christ or close communion with Christ (cf. Gal 3:27), the communal aspect of baptism (cf. 1 Cor 12:13), and prayer related to baptism (cf. 1 Pt 3:21).

Besides the presence of these motifs in the six examined healing miracle stories, we also highlighted the role of faith, as it is a prominent element in both healing miracles and baptism, and connected with baptismal motifs. In our parallels, we always considered that the motifs discovered in the miracles were mere foreshadowings of baptismal motifs, reminding us of them, however, they are fully realized only in baptism.

Among the healing stories in the Gospel of Mark, the story of the leper (cf. Mark 1:40-45) is the first to seriously focus on the relationship between faith and healing, showing the healing of the whole person. The leper's approach and words to Jesus express deep trust and openness towards the healing, miracle-working Jesus. This trust and openness he showed are constituent elements of faith. After healing, he testified everywhere about the miraculous event, thus becoming a confessor and witness of Jesus, which is a fundamental motif of discipleship. This perspective of his completely new life, regained health, and movement after healing, which is aimed at making offerings in the Temple of Jerusalem and culminating in preaching, can be related to the new life described for a baptized person in Romans 6:3-11. The cleansing of the leper and the baptismal motif of purification found in 1 Cor 6:11, Eph 5:26, and Tit 3:5-7, stems from the Old Testament precedent, the story of the Syrian Naaman’s cleansing (cf. 2 Kings 5:8-14). In baptism, washing refers both to the physical ritual of submerging in water and to spiritual cleansing and forgiveness of sins. Even though there is no mention of washing in Mark 1:40-45, the declaration of purification alludes to Naaman's. Thus, both baptism (cf. 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26), and the cleansing of the leper (cf. 2 Kings 5:10; Mark 1:40-42) are presented as purification from some form of defilement or negative factor. In 1 Cor 12:13, the communal

aspect of baptism is highlighted, which is also evident in the case of a man who had been impure and became pure, as he was restored to community membership and his previous exclusion ceased. After having been cleansed, he could participate in Israel's cultic practices, and it was even his duty to make offerings (cf. Mark 1:43). After purification, Christians take part in the cult and liturgy of the new Israel, the church, and share in the Eucharist. The synoptic parallels of Mark 1:40-45 in terms of the main motifs agree with the original of Mark; we do not observe significant shifts in emphasis.

In the next pericope (cf. 2:1-12) – the story of the paralytic's healing – the paralytic and his carriers demonstrate their commitment and overcoming faith when they lower him through the roof in front of Jesus. Their openness towards the healer and trust in his power to help allows them to overcome any obstacles. Their communal act also expresses solidarity with the paralytic, upon seeing which, Jesus forgives the man's sins. The paralytic also experiences complete healing, regaining both the purity of his soul, freed from what burdened it, and freedom from his physical paralysis. Thus he goes through a dual liberation and dual healing, as Jesus, the Son of Man, has the divine power to do both (cf. 2:10-12). The forgiveness of sins experienced by the paralytic is a significant motif also in baptism (cf. Acts 2:38) and is closely associated with faith (cf. Mark 2:5), as in baptism. Mark uses words for the paralytic's healing that in early Christian tradition signify Christ's resurrection and the new Christian life. Thus, the awakening of the paralyzed body associates with resurrection from death (cf. Rom 6:4; Col 2:12), while the healed man's departure suggests the new way of life characteristic of the baptized (cf. Rom 6:4). In the context of the story, a completely new life opens up for the healed paralytic. He is literally "walking in newness of life" as he can now move, which is a totally new perspective to his life. From Matthew's parallel version, it is evident that the healing of the sick fades significantly compared to the motif of forgiveness of sins; in fact, healing only demonstrates that Jesus indeed has the power to forgive sins. In this way, the faith motif, which is so emphasized in Mark, also recedes into the background. In Luke's version (cf. Luke 5:17-26), no such shift in emphasis can be detected, meaning Luke's perspective aligns with Mark's.

In the third pericope we analyzed – the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage (cf. Mark 5:21-43) –, the father explicitly expresses his request, while the woman only silently and secretly, but the fundamental motif of their faith is the deep conviction that Jesus is the Lord of life beyond all human power, indicating His close relationship with God, through which God's miraculous power effectively works in Jesus' public ministry on Earth. The father's faith is particularly tested by the events, and despite his daughter's death, he believes that the Master can restore her life, that He indeed has divine authority even over death.

This complex story demonstrates the close connection between faith and healing both in the case of the woman with a hemorrhage and Jairus' daughter. In both cases, a profound, existential feature of faith emerges, capable of perseverance and even growth despite fear and human expectations. The healer individually addresses both difficult cases. In the latter, it is the father's faith and request (cf. 5:23, 36) that initiate the healing. Jesus heals the whole person and gives them back to life in both stories of the intercalated structure. He reciprocates their openness and believing approach to Him with divine mercy, making both miraculous events more than just physical healing: in both cases, the whole person is healed.

In Mark 5:42, the consequence of the resurrection is a lasting new state, representing the girl's new life. Being only twelve years old, it applies to her that she walks "in newness of life": she still has her entire adult life ahead of her. The text expresses walking after her resurrection with the same term used in Rom 6:4 for walking in newness of life. Her new life given by Jesus is also connected to Tit 3:5-7: she also was reborn from the state of physical death to earthly life. The renewal and rebirth of the baptized in Tit 3:5 occur in the washing of the Holy Spirit, anticipating eternal life for them. The early Christian baptismal formula in Eph 5:14 has several expressions parallel to the resurrection of the girl, with three direct matches found in our passage. Jesus calls the girl "sleeping" as Eph 5:14 refers to those before baptism, and her resurrection is described with the same verbs. Thus, her resurrection primarily foreshadows Christ's, but also hints at the resurrection occurring in baptism as per Eph 5:14. Essential to resurrection is the faith in God's power to raise the dead (cf. Col 2:12), which in baptism refers to Christ's resurrection, and for Jairus, refers to raising his daughter from the dead.

In the story of the woman with the hemorrhage, baptismal motifs are also present. Her physical healing and purification is elevated to the level of spiritual healing through her sincere confession to Jesus. There is a parallel with the purification motif in 1 Cor 6:11, because just as the woman became pure through the healing thouch, the baptized become inwardly pure through their baptism. Still, baptism signifies a deeper reality, closely tied to sanctification and justification. Her contact with Christ through her touch brings healing and a personal relationship with the healer. Thus, through the healing touch, the woman "puts on" Christ's healing power, connecting her to God's kingdom anew. In Gal 3:27, putting on Christ signifies the closest communion, crucial for divine sonship.

In Luke's parallel passage (cf. Luke 8:40-56), the motif of salvation through faith is stronger in the words of Jesus' encouragement to the father in Jairus's story, as the command "Do not be afraid; just believe!" is supplemented with the sentence "she will be healed"

(σωθήσεται). This further underlines the connection with baptismal motifs. In the much shorter version in Matthew (cf. Matthew 9:18-26), the scene of the girl's resurrection is more condense, making the allusion to Christ's resurrection and baptismal motifs less emphasized. Interestingly, however, due to the significant abridgment, the motif of faith stands out more prominently in Matthew's version. In Matthew's account, Jairus's daughter is already dead at the beginning of the story, so the father directly asks Jesus to resurrect his dead daughter, which naturally implies a much greater faith in the miracle worker.

The story of the blind man at Bethsaida (cf. Mark 8:22-26) is unique in its gradual healing procedure, symbolizing the disciples' developing yet imperfect faith. The gradual restoration of sight and the intermediate state between full clarity and total blindness symbolically depict this evolving faith. The full restoration of the blind man's sight granted him a complete life: enabling an independent, adult life. The implicit faith motif in miracles appears via the assistance and request of those leading the blind man to Jesus. The gradual restoration of the blind man's sight in the gospel narrative parallels the disciples' improving faith and understanding and also the reader's journey of faith, emphasizing the necessity for growth even after conversion and baptism. The context of New Testament baptism texts also expresses the need for ongoing progress post-baptism (cf. Rom 6:12-23; 1 Cor 6:1-10, 12-20; Eph 5:1-13; Tit 3:1-3). For the blind man of Bethsaida, creation and renewal occur, while the baptized person experiences this renewal through immersion in the Holy Spirit, regenerating them for Christ-like life (cf. Tit 3:5). This pericope has no parallel in the other two synoptic Gospels.

In the story of the epileptic or demoniac boy (cf. Mark 9:14-29), faith appears in dual aspects: the developing faith of the boy's father and that of the disciples in need for more education and formation. Initially, the disciples cannot heal the boy and argue with the scribes. Jesus resolves the situation, challenging and strengthening the father's faith, and cures the boy. The dialogue between Jesus and the distressed father reveals the father's desperate journey of faith, touching on the omnipotence of faith and the believer's doubt. Ultimately, the father's faith withstands Jesus' challenge, as he primarily asks for the miracle to occur, fully opening to God's miraculous power. Jesus remains the ultimate example and standard of true faith, as His genuine humanity provides the foundation of dialogue on human faith. In Mark 9:26b-27, the narrative resembles a resurrection scene, with terminology linking it to both the raising of Jairus's daughter and accounts of Jesus' own resurrection, containing core resurrection verbs. Hence, there is a parallel with Rom 6:3-11: just as the epileptic boy rises from a state like death through Christ's power, so the baptized, united with Christ will share in his resurrection (cf. Rom 6:5). The resurrection verbs in Eph 5:14 are the same as in Mark 9:27, symbolically akin,

as Christ raises the baptized from their former life and darkness of sin to Christian life's light. A connection exists also between 1 Pt 3:21 and Mark 9:29 regarding prayer, as the former refers to pre-baptismal liturgical prayer, while the latter emphasizes prayer's importance as the primary means of exorcism.

After comparing this pericope with the other two synoptics, we can conclude that important motifs are missing in the parallel passages. In the significantly shorter text of Matthew (cf. Matthew 17:14-21), there is no mention at all of the father's faith in interceding for his son, nor of the child's resurrection-like healing. In Luke's version (cf. Luke 9:37-43), the motif of faith is entirely absent, and the healing process is simplified, thereby removing any allusion to resurrection.

In the last healing scene in Mark's Gospel (cf. Mark 10:46-52), the story of the blind Bartimaeus particularly highlights faith and becoming a disciple. From Mark's perspective, this process exemplifies what his followers must achieve: regaining inner "sight" to follow Jesus towards the cross. Bartimaeus' blindness meant total dependence and humiliation to him, while healing offered him an escape from this disadvantaged state, enabling him to become a disciple. His encounter with the Master and his healing as a result of this encounter signify a radical transformation and novelty, marked by verbs indicating movement, reminiscent of walking in newness of life in Rom 6:4. In Bartimaeus' case, the emphasis is on gaining sight, or spiritual enlightenment as a symbol of understanding and a personal relationship with God, paralleling Eph 5:14. Physical and spiritual enlightenment goes hand in hand: becoming sighted and a disciple coincide. The core of these dual parallel events is Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who illuminates Bartimaeus' life, restoring his sight and fostering a fuller relationship with God. Similarly, Christ's light enlightens the baptized, who become not just followers of Christ but sharers in his light and an intimate union with Him. Bartimaeus was saved by his faith on his path to sight and discipleship. This salvation, beyond physical healing, signified the prospect of his salvation as a new follower of Christ. Thus, it's plausible that Mark's contemporaries saw an analogy between Bartimaeus' faith and their salvation, and the candidates' faith and baptismal salvation (cf. Tit 3:5; 1 Pt 3:21).

The Lucan version of Mark 10:46-52 (cf. Luke 18:35-43) essentially matches the original, with the addition of the theme of praising God concluding the narrative. The elements of becoming a disciple may be less emphasized, but the main Markan motifs are present. Among Matthew's two accounts of healing the blind, one completely lacks any reference to the faith of the blind men (cf. Matthew 20:29-34), while in the other, it is emphasized (cf. Matthew 9:27-31). However, in the former, the motif of following is present, and it also includes the

touch familiar from the story of the blind man in Bethsaida, as well as an explicit reference to Jesus' mercy, which is an addition even compared to the original in Mark.

Based on the above, we believe that the dissertation successfully pointed out to that baptismal motifs reflective of early Christian baptismal understanding are discernible in Mark's healing miracle narratives. It is also worth noting that in the canonical conclusion of Mark's Gospel, miracles are mentioned (cf. Mark 16:17-18), which the text refers to as signs accompanying believers (cf. Mark 16:17: σημεῖα δὲ τοῖς πιστεύσασιν ταῦτα παρακολουθήσει). These can be paralleled with the miracles performed in the early church (cf. Acts 14:3; Romans 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 12:12). In the Markan text, the basis for these miracles is the faith arising from the proclamation of the gospel and the baptism that follows as a consequence (cf. Mark 16:15-16). Therefore, the proclamation of the gospel, faith, and the sacrament of baptism are more significant realities because they are the source of salvation (cf. Mark 16:16: ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται). Compared to them, miraculous signs in the church are secondary, although they undoubtedly have a confirming effect. While during Jesus's earthly ministry, His miracles – especially healing miracles – already realized the kingdom of God and foreshadowed the prospect of eternal salvation, after Easter, wonders became secondary accompaniments to the salvation effectively working through the sacraments as proclaimed by apostolic preaching in the life of the early church. This perspective is supported by the wise words of Pope Saint Leo the Great: "What was visible in our Redeemer has passed over into the sacraments, so that faith might be more excellent and stronger; sight is succeeded by doctrine, whose authority believers' hearts enlightened by heaven's rays follow."[3]

[3]*Sancti Leonis Magni Romani Pontificis Opera Omnia* (Patrologiae Cursus Completus/Patrologia Latina 54), Migne, Párizs 1881, 398.